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Writings of H. D. Thoreau.

His power of observation seemed to indicate additional senses. He saw as with microscope, heard as with ear-trumpet; and his memory was a photographic register of all he saw and heard.—
R. W. EMERSON.

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LETTERS

TO VARIOUS PERSONS.

BY

HENRY D. THOREAU,

AUTHOR OF "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS,"
"WALDEN," ETC., ETC.

Eighth Edition.



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EDITOR'S NOTICE.



It may interest the reader of this book to know that nearly all these letters have been printed directly from the original autographs furnished by the persons to whom they were addressed. A few have been carefully copied, but without alteration, from the worn and torn originals. In some letters, passages have been omitted on account of private or personal references. Otherwise, the letters have been printed as they stood, with very few verbal corrections.

R. W. E.

12 May, 1865.

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LETTERS.



TO MISS THOREAU.

CONCORD, June 13, 1840.

DEAR H——: —

That letter to J——, for which you had an opportunity doubtless to substitute a more perfect communication, fell, as was natural, into the hands of his “transcendental brother,” who is his proxy in such cases, having been commissioned to acknowledge and receipt all bills that may be presented. But what’s in a name? Perhaps it does not matter whether it be John or Henry. Nor will those same six months have to be altered, I fear, to suit his case as well. But methinks they have not passed entirely without intercourse, provided we have been sincere though humble worshippers of the same virtue in the mean time. Certainly it is better that we should make ourselves quite sure of such a communion as this by the only course which is completely free from suspicion,—the coincidence of two earnest and aspiring lives,—than run the risk of a disappointment by relying wholly or chiefly on so meagre and uncertain a means as

speech, whether written or spoken, affords. How often, when we have been nearest each other bodily, have we really been farthest off! Our tongues were the withy foils with which we fenced each other off. Not that we have not met heartily and with profit as members of one family, but it was a small one surely, and not that other human family. We have met frankly and without concealment ever, as befits those who have an instinctive trust in one another, and the scenery of whose outward lives has been the same, but never as prompted by an earnest and affectionate desire to probe deeper our mutual natures. Such intercourse, at least, if it has ever been, has not condescended to the vulgarities of oral communication, for the ears are provided with no lid as the eye is, and would not have been deaf to it in sleep. And now glad am I, if I am not mistaken in imagining that some such transcendental inquisitiveness has travelled post *thither*, — for, as I observed before, where the bolt hits, thither was it aimed, — any arbitrary direction notwithstanding.

Thus much, at least, our *kindred* temperament of mind and body — and long *family*-arity — have done for us, that we already find ourselves standing on a solid and natural footing with respect to one another, and shall not have to waste time in the so often unavailing endeavor to arrive fairly at this simple ground.

Let us leave trifles, then, to accident; and poli

tics, and finance, and such gossip, to the moments when diet and exercise are cared for, and speak to each other deliberately as out of one infinity into another, — you there in time and space, and I here. For beside this relation, all books and doctrines are no better than gossip or the turning of a spit.

Equally to you and S——, from

Your affectionate brother,

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. BROWN.

CONCORD, July 21, 1841.

DEAR FRIEND : —

Don't think I need any prompting to write to you ; but what tough earthenware shall I put into my packet to travel over so many hills, and thrid so many woods, as lie between Concord and Plymouth ? Thank fortune it is all the way down hill, so they will get safely carried ; and yet it seems as if it were writing against time and the sun, to send a letter east, for no natural force forwards it. You should go dwell in the west, and then I would deluge you with letters, as boys throw feathers into the air to see the wind take them. I should rather fancy you at evening dwelling far away behind the serene curtain of

the west, — the home of fair weather, - - than over by the chilly sources of the east wind.

What quiet thoughts have you now-a-days which will float on that east wind to west, for so we may make our worst servants our carriers, — what progress made from *can't* to *can*, in practice and theory? Under this category, you remember, we used to place all our philosophy. Do you have any still, startling, well moments, in which you think grandly, and speak with emphasis? Don't take this for sarcasm, for not in a year of the gods, I fear, will such a golden approach to plain speaking revolve again. But away with such fears; by a few miles of travel, we have not distanced each other's sincerity.

I grow savager and savager every day, as if fed on raw meat, and my tameness is only the repose of untamableness. I dream of looking abroad summer and winter, with free gaze, from some mountain-side, while my eyes revolve in an Egyptian slime of health, — I to be nature looking into nature, with such easy sympathy as the blue-eyed grass in the meadow looks in the face of the sky. From some such recess I would put forth sublime thoughts daily, as the plant puts forth leaves. Now-a-nights I go on to the hill to see the sun set, as one would go home at evening, — the bustle of the village has run on all day, and left me quite in the rear; but I see the sunset and find that it can wait for my slow virtue.

But I forget that you think more of this human nature than of this nature I praise. Why won't you believe that mine is more human than any single man or woman can be? that in it, — in the sunset there, are all the qualities that can adorn a household, — and that sometimes in a fluttering leaf, one may hear all your Christianity preached.

You see how unskilful a letter-writer I am, thus to have come to the end of my sheet, when hardly arrived at the beginning of my story. I was going to be soberer, I assure you, but now have only room to add, — that if the fates allot you a serene hour, don't fail to communicate some of its serenity to your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

No, no. Improve so rare a gift for yourself, and send me of your leisure.

TO MRS. L. C. B.

CONCORD, Wednesday Evening,
September 8 [1841].

DEAR FRIEND: —

Your note came wafted to my hand, like the first leaf of the Fall on the September wind, and I put only another interpretation upon its lines,

than upon the veins of those which are soon to be strewed around me. It is nothing but Indian Summer here at present. I mean that any weather seems reserved expressly for our late purposes, whenever we happen to be fulfilling them. I do not know what right I have to so much happiness, but rather hold it in reserve till the time of my desert.

What with the crickets, and the lowing of kine, and the crowing of cocks, our Concord life is sonorous enough. Sometimes I hear the cock bestir himself on his perch under my feet and crow shrilly long before dawn, and I think I might have been born any year for all the phenomena I know.

We count sixteen eggs daily now, when arithmetic will only fetch the hens up to thirteen; but the world is young, and we wait to see this eccentricity complete its period.

My verses on Friendship are already printed in the Dial, not expanded, but reduced to completeness, by leaving out the long lines, which always have, or should have, a longer, or at least another sense than short ones.

Just now I am in the mid-sea of verses, and they actually rustle round me, as the leaves would round the head of Autumnus himself, should he thrust it up through some vales which I know, but, alas! many of them are but crisped and yellow leaves like his, I fear, and will deserve no better fate than

to make mould for new harvests. I see the stanza rise around me, verse upon verse, far and near, like the mountains from Agiocochook, not all having a terrestrial existence as yet, even as some of them may be clouds ; but I fancy I see the gleam of some Sebago Lake and silver cascade, at whose well I may drink one day. I am as unfit for any practical purpose — I mean for the furtherance of the world's ends — as gossamer for ship-timber ; and I, who am going to be a pencil-maker to-morrow, can sympathize with God Apollo, who served King Admetus for a while on earth. But I believe he found it for his advantage at last, — as I am sure I shall, though I shall hold the nobler part at least out of the service.

Don't attach any undue seriousness to this threnody, for I love my fate to the very core and rind, and could swallow it without paring it, I think. You ask if I have written any more poems ? Excepting those which Vulcan is now forging, I have only discharged a few more bolts into the horizon, in all, three hundred verses, and sent them, as I may say, over the mountains to Miss Fuller, who may have occasion to remember the old rhyme, —

“ Three scipen gode
Comen mid than flode
Three hundred cnihten.”

But these are far more Vandalic than they. In this narrow sheet there is not room even for one

thought to root itself ; but you must consider this an odd leaf of a volume, and that volume

Your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. L. C. B.

CONCORD, October 5, 1841.

DEAR FRIEND : —

I send you Williams's letter as the last remembrancer to one of those " whose acquaintance " had the pleasure to form while in Concord." It came quite unexpectedly to me, but I was very glad to receive it, though I hardly know whether my utmost sincerity and interest can inspire a sufficient answer to it. I should like to have you send it back by some convenient opportunity.

Pray let me know what you are thinking about any day, — what most nearly concerns you. Last winter, you know, you did more than your share of the talking, and I did not complain for want of an opportunity. Imagine your stove-door out of order, at least, and then while I am fixing it, you will think of enough things to say.

What makes the value of your life at present ? what dreams have you ? and what realizations ? You know there is a high table-land which not even the east wind reaches. Now can't we walk

and chat upon its plane still, as if there were no lower latitudes? Surely our two destinies are topics interesting and grand enough for any occasion.

I hope you have many gleams of serenity and health, or, if your body will grant you no positive respite, — that you may, at any rate, enjoy your sickness occasionally, as much as I used to tell of. But here is the bundle going to be done up, so accept a “good-night” from

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. L. C. B.

CONCORD, March 2, 1842.

DEAR FRIEND:—

I believe I have nothing new to tell you, for what was news you have learned from other sources. I am much the same person that I was, who should be so much better; yet when I realize what has transpired, and the greatness of the part I am unconsciously acting, I am thrilled, and it seems as if there were none in history to match it.

Soon after John's death I listened to a music-box, and if, at any time, that event had seemed inconsistent with the beauty and harmony of the universe, it was then gently constrained into the

placid course of nature by those steady notes, in mild and unoffended tone echoing far and wide under the heavens. But I find these things more strange than sad to me. What right have I to grieve, who have not ceased to wonder? We feel at first as if some opportunities of kindness and sympathy were lost, but learn afterward that any *pure grief* is ample recompense for all. That is, if we are faithful; for a great grief is but sympathy with the soul that disposes events, and is as natural as the resin on Arabian trees. Only Nature has a right to grieve perpetually, for she only is innocent. Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever. The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful, if he is not.

We are made happy when reason can discover no occasion for it. The memory of some past moments is more persuasive than the experience of present ones. There have been visions of such breadth and brightness that these notes were invisible in their light.

I do not wish to see John ever again, — I mean him who is dead, — but that other, whom only he would have wished to see, or to be, of whom he was the imperfect representative. For we are not what we are, nor do we treat or esteem each other for such, but for what we are capable of being.

As for Waldo, he died as the mist rises from the brook, which the sun will soon dart his rays through. Do not the flowers die every autumn? He had not even taken root here. I was not startled to hear that he was dead: it seemed the most natural event that could happen. His fine organization demanded it, and nature gently yielded its request. It would have been strange if he had lived. Neither will nature manifest any sorrow at his death, but soon the note of the lark will be heard down in the meadow, and fresh dandelions will spring from the old stocks where he plucked them last summer.

I have been living ill of late, but am now doing better. How do you live in that Plymouth world, now-a-days? Please remember me to M—— R——. You must not blame me if I do *talk to the clouds*, for I remain

Your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. FULLER.

CONCORD, January 16, 1843.

DEAR RICHARD: —

I need not thank you for your present, for I hear its music, which seems to be playing just for us two pilgrims marching over hill and dale of a

summer afternoon, up those long Bolton hills and by those bright Harvard lakes, such as I see in the placid Lucerne on the lid; and whenever I hear it, it will recall happy hours passed with its donor.

When did mankind make that foray into nature and bring off this booty? For certainly it is but history that some rare virtue in remote times plundered these strains from above and communicated them to men. Whatever we may think of it, it is a part of the harmony of the spheres you have sent me, which has condescended to serve us Admetuses, and I hope I may so behave that this may always be the tenor of your thought for me.

If you have any strains, the conquest of your own spear or quill, to accompany these, let the winds waft them also to me.

I write this with one of the "primaries" of my osprey's wings, which I have preserved over my glass for some state occasion, and now it offers.

Mrs. E—— sends her love.

Your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. L. C. B.

CONCORD, January 24, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND: —

The other day I wrote you a letter to go in Mrs. E——'s bundle, but, as it seemed unworthy, I did not send it, and now, to atone for that, I am going to send this, whether it be worthy or not. I will not venture upon news, for, as all the household are gone to bed, I cannot learn what has been told you. Do you read any noble verses nowadays? or do not verses still seem noble? For my own part, they have been the only things I remembered, or that which occasioned them, when all things else were blurred and defaced. All things have put on mourning but they; for the elegy itself is some victorious melody or joy escaping from the wreck.

It is a relief to read some true book, wherein all are equally dead, — equally alive. I think the best parts of Shakespeare would only be enhanced by the most thrilling and affecting events. I have found it so. And so much the more, as they are not intended for consolation.

Do you think of coming to Concord again? I shall be glad to see you. I should be glad to know that I could see you when I would.

We always seem to be living just on the brink of a pure and lofty intercourse, which would make the ills and trivialness of life ridiculous. After

each little interval, though it be but for the night, we are prepared to meet each other as gods and goddesses.

I seem to have dodged all my days with one or two persons, and lived upon expectation, — as if the bud would surely blossom; and so I am content to live.

What means the fact, — which is so common, so universal, — that some soul that has lost all hope for itself can inspire in another listening soul an infinite confidence in it, even while it is expressing its despair?

I am very happy in my present environment, though actually mean enough myself, and so, of course, all around me; yet, I am sure, we for the most part are transfigured to one another, and are that to the other which we aspire to be ourselves. The longest course of mean and trivial intercourse may not prevent my practising this divine courtesy to my companion. Notwithstanding all I hear about brooms, and scouring, and taxes, and house-keeping, I am constrained to live a strangely mixed life, — as if even Valhalla might have its kitchen. We are all of us Apollos serving some Admetus.

I think I must have some muses in my pay that I know not of, for certain musical wishes of mine are answered as soon as entertained. Last summer I went to Hawthorne's suddenly for the express purpose of borrowing his music-box, and

almost immediately Mrs. H—— proposed to lend it to me. The other day I said I must go to Mrs. Barrett's to hear hers, and, lo! straightway Richard F—— sent me one for a present from Cambridge. It is a very good one. I should like to have you hear it. I shall not have to employ you to borrow for me now. Good night.

From your affectionate friend,

H. D. T.

TO MRS. L. C. B.

CONCORD, Friday Evening,
January 25, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND: —

Mrs. E—— asks me to write you a letter, which she will put into her bundle to-morrow along with the Tribunes and Standards, and miscellanies, and what not, to make an assortment. But what shall I write. You live a good way off, and I don't know that I have anything which will bear sending so far. But I am mistaken, or rather impatient when I say this, — for we all have a gift to send, not only when the year begins, but as long as interest and memory last. I don't know whether you have got the many I have sent you, or rather whether you were quite sure where they came from. I mean the letters I have sometimes launched off eastward in my

thought ; but if you have been happier at one time than another, think that then you received them. But this that I now send you is of another sort. It will go slowly, drawn by horses over muddy roads, and lose much of its little value by the way. You may have to pay for it, and it may not make you happy after all. But what shall be my new-year's gift, then ? Why, I will send you my still fresh remembrance of the hours I have passed with you here, for I find in the remembrance of them the best gift you have left to me. We are poor and sick creatures at best ; but we can have well memories, and sound and healthy thoughts of one another still, and an intercourse may be remembered which was without blur, and above us both.

Perhaps you may like to know of my estate nowadays. As usual, I find it harder to account for the happiness I enjoy, than for the sadness which instructs me occasionally. If the little of this last which visits me would only be sadder, it would be happier. One while I am vexed by a sense of meanness ; one while I simply wonder at the mystery of life ; and at another, and at another, seem to rest on my oars, as if propelled by propitious breezes from I know not what quarter. But for the most part, I am an idle, inefficient, lingering (one term will do as well as another, where all are true and none true enough) member of the great commonwealth, who have most need of my

own charity, — if I could not be charitable and indulgent to myself, perhaps as good a subject for my own satire as any. You see how, when I come to talk of myself, I soon run dry; for I would fain make that a subject which can be no subject for me, at least not till I have the grace to rule myself.

I do not venture to say anything about your griefs, for it would be unnatural for me to speak as if I grieved with you, when I think I do not. If I were to see you, it might be otherwise. But I know you will pardon the trivialness of this letter; and I only hope — as I know that you have reason to be so — that you are still happier than you are sad, and that you remember that the smallest seed of faith is of more worth than the largest fruit of happiness. I have no doubt that out of S——'s death you sometimes draw sweet consolation, not only for that, but for long-standing griefs, and may find some things made smooth by it, which before were rough.

I wish you would communicate with me, and not think me unworthy to know any of your thoughts. Don't think me unkind because I have not written to you. I confess it was for so poor a reason as that you almost made a principle of not answering. I could not speak truly with this ugly fact in the way; and perhaps I wished to be assured, by such evidence as you could not voluntarily give, that it was a kindness. For

every glance at the moon, does she not send me an answering ray? Noah would hardly have done himself the pleasure to release his dove, if she had not been about to come back to him with tidings of green islands amid the waste.

But these are far-fetched reasons. I am not speaking directly enough to yourself now, so let me say *directly* from

Your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO R. F. FULLER.

CONCORD, April 2, 1843.

DEAR RICHARD: —

I was glad to receive a letter from you so bright and cheery. You speak of not having made any conquests with your own spear or quill as yet; but if you are tempering your spear-head during these days, and fitting a straight and tough shaft thereto, will not that suffice? We are more pleased to consider the hero in the forest cutting cornel or ash for his spear, than marching in triumph with his trophies. The present hour is always wealthiest when it is poorer than the future ones, as that is the pleasantest site which affords the pleasantest prospects.

What you say about your studies furnishing

you with a "mimic idiom" only, reminds me that we shall all do well if we learn so much as to talk, — to speak truth. The only fruit which even much living yields seems to be often only some trivial success, — the ability to do some slight thing better. We make conquest only of husks and shells for the most part, — at least apparently, — but sometimes these are cinnamon and spices, you know. Even the grown hunter you speak of slays a thousand buffaloes, and brings off only their hides and tongues. What immense sacrifices, what hecatombs and holocausts, the gods exact for very slight favors! How much sincere life before we can even utter one sincere word.

What I was learning in College was chiefly, I think, to express myself, and I see now, that as the old orator prescribed, 1st, action; 2d, action; 3d, action; my teachers should have prescribed to me, 1st, sincerity; 2d, sincerity; 3d, sincerity. The old mythology is incomplete without a god or goddess of sincerity, on whose altars we might offer up all the products of our farms, our workshops, and our studies. It should be our Lar when we sit on the hearth, and our Tutelar Genius when we walk abroad. This is the only panacea. I mean sincerity in our dealings with ourselves mainly; any other is comparatively easy. But I must stop before I get to 17thly. I believe I have but one text and one sermon.

Your rural adventures beyond the West Cam-

bridge hills have probably lost nothing by distance of time or space. I used to hear only the sough of the wind in the woods of Concord, when I was striving to give my attention to a page of Calculus. But, depend upon it, you will love your native hills the better for being separated from them.

I expect to leave Concord, which is my Rome, and its people, who are my Romans, in May, and go to New York, to be a tutor in Mr. William Emerson's family. So I will bid you good by till I see you or hear from you again.

Your friend,

H. D. THOREAU.

— — — — —

TO MRS. E.

CASTLETON, Staten Island, May 22, 1842. ✓

MY DEAR FRIEND: —

I believe a good many conversations with you were left in an unfinished state, and now indeed I don't know where to take them up. But I will resume some of the unfinished silence. I shall not hesitate to know you. I think of you as some elder sister of mine, whom I could not have avoided, — a sort of lunar influence, — only of such age as the moon, whose time is measured by her light. You must know that you represent to

me woman, for I have not travelled very far or wide, — and what if I had? I like to deal with you, for I believe you do not lie or steal, and these are very rare virtues. I thank you for your influence for two years. I was fortunate to be subjected to it, and am now to remember it. It is the noblest gift we can make; what signify all others that can be bestowed? You have helped to keep my life “on loft,” as Chaucer says of Griselda, and in a better sense. You always seemed to look down at me as from some elevation — some of your high humilities — and I was the better for having to look up. I felt taxed not to disappoint your expectation; for could there be any accident so sad as to be respected for something better than we are? It was a pleasure even to go away from you, as it is not to meet some, as it apprised me of my high relations; and such a departure is a sort of further introduction and meeting. Nothing makes the earth seem so spacious as to have friends at a distance; they make the latitudes and longitudes.

You must not think that fate is so dark there, for even here I can see a faint reflected light over Concord, and I think that at this distance I can better weigh the value of a doubt there. Your moonlight, as I have told you, though it is a reflection of the sun, allows of bats and owls and other twilight birds to flit therein. But I am very glad that you can elevate your life with a

doubt, for I am sure that it is nothing but an insatiable faith after all, that deepens and darkens its current. And your doubt and my confidence are only a difference of expression.

I have hardly begun to live on Staten Island yet; but, like the man who, when forbidden to tread on English ground, carried Scottish ground in his boots, I carry Concord ground in my boots and in my hat, — and am I not made of Concord dust? I cannot realize that it is the roar of the sea I hear now, and not the wind in Walden woods. I find more of Concord, after all, in the prospect of the sea, beyond Sandy Hook, than in the fields and woods.

If you were to have this Hugh the gardener for your man, you would think a new dispensation had commenced. He might put a fairer aspect on the natural world for you, or at any rate a screen between you and the almshouse. There is a beautiful red honeysuckle now in blossom in the woods here, which should be transplanted to Concord; and if what they tell me about the tulip-tree be true, you should have that also. I have not seen Mrs. Black yet, but I intend to call on her soon. Have you established those simpler modes of living yet? — “In the full tide of successful operation?”

Tell Mrs. Brown that I hope she is anchored in a secure haven and derives much pleasure still from reading the poets, and that her constellation

s not quite set from my sight, though it is sunk so low in that northern horizon. Tell E—— H—— that her bright present did “carry ink safely to Staten Island,” and was a conspicuous object in Master Haven’s inventory of my effects. Give my respects to Madam E——, whose Concord face I should be glad to see here this summer; and remember me to the rest of the household who have had vision of me. Shake a day-day to Edith, and say good night to Ellen for me. Farewell.

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. E.

STATEN ISLAND, June 20, 1843.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND: —

I have only read a page of your letter, and have come out to the top of the hill at sunset, where I can see the ocean, to prepare to read the rest. It is fitter that it should hear it than the walls of my chamber. The very crickets here seem to chirp around me as they did not before. I feel as if it were a great daring to go on and read the rest, and then to live accordingly. There are more than thirty vessels in sight going to sea. I am almost afraid to look at your letter. I see that it will make my life very steep, but it may lead to fairer prospects than this.

You seem to me to speak out of a very clear and high heaven, where any one may be who stands so high. Your voice seems not a voice, but comes as much from the blue heavens as from the paper.

My dear friend, it was very noble in you to write me so trustful an answer. It will do as well for another world as for this ; such a voice is for no particular time nor person, but it makes him who may hear it stand for all that is lofty and true in humanity. The thought of you will constantly elevate my life ; it will be something always above the horizon to behold, as when I look up at the evening star. I think I know your thoughts without seeing you, and as well here as in Concord. You are not at all strange to me.

I could hardly believe, after the lapse of one night, that I had such a noble letter still at hand to read, — that it was not some fine dream. I looked at midnight to be sure that it was real. I feel that I am unworthy to know you, and yet they will not permit it wrongfully.

I, perhaps, am more willing to deceive by appearances than you say you are ; it would not be worth the while to tell how willing ; but I have the power perhaps too much to forget my meanness as soon as seen, and not be incited by permanent sorrow. My actual life is unspeakably mean compared with what I know and see that it might be. Yet the ground from which I see and

say this is some part of it. It ranges from heaven to earth, and is all things in an hour. The experience of every past moment but belies the faith of each present. We never conceive the greatness of our fates. Are not these faint flashes of light which sometimes obscure the sun their certain dawn?

My friend, I have read your letter as if I was not reading it. After each pause I could defer the rest forever. The thought of you will be a new motive for every right action. You are another human being whom I know, and might not our topic be as broad as the universe? What have we to do with petty rumbling news? We have our own great affairs. Sometimes in Concord I found my actions dictated, as it were, by your influence, and though it lead almost to trivial Hindoo observances, yet it was good and elevating. To hear that you have sad hours is not sad to me. I rather rejoice at the richness of your experience. Only think of some sadness away in Pekin, — unseen and unknown there. What a mine it is! Would it not weigh down the Celestial Empire, with all its gay Chinese? Our sadness is not sad, but our cheap joys. Let us be sad about all we see and are, for so we demand and pray for better. It is the constant prayer and whole Christian religion. I could hope that you would get well soon, and have a healthy body for this world, but I know this cannot be; and the

Fates, after all, are the accomplishers of our hopes. Yet I do hope that you may find it a worthy struggle, and life seem grand still through the clouds.

What wealth is it to have such friends that we cannot think of them without elevation ! And we can think of them any time and anywhere, and it costs nothing but the lofty disposition. I cannot tell you the joy your letter gives me, which will not quite cease till the latest time. Let me accompany your finest thought.

I send my love to my other friend and brother, whose nobleness I slowly recognize.

HENRY.

TO MR. E.

STATEN ISLAND, August 7, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND : —

I fear I have nothing to send you worthy of so good an opportunity. Of New York I still know but little, though out of so many thousands there are no doubt many units whom it would be worth my while to know. Mr. James talks of going to Germany soon with his wife to learn the language. He says he must know it ; can never learn it here ; there he may absorb it ; and is very anxious to learn beforehand where he had best locate himself to enjoy the advantage of the

highest culture, learn the language in its purity, and not exceed his limited means. I referred him to Longfellow. Perhaps you can help him.

I have had a pleasant talk with Channing; and Greeley, too, it was refreshing to meet. They were both much pleased with your criticism on Carlyle, but thought that you had overlooked what chiefly concerned them in the book,—its practical aim and merits.

I have also spent some pleasant hours with W. and T. at their counting-room, or rather intelligence office.

I must still reckon myself with the innumerable army of invalids,—undoubtedly in a fair field they would rout the well,—though I am tougher than formerly. Methinks I could paint the sleepy god more truly than the poets have done, from more intimate experience. Indeed, I have not kept my eyes very steadily open to the things of this world of late, and hence have little to report concerning them. However, I trust the awakening will come before the last trump,—and then perhaps I may remember some of my dreams.

I study the aspects of commerce at its Narrows here, where it passes in review before me, and this seems to be beginning at the right end to understand this Babylon. I have made a very rude translation of the Seven against Thebes, and Pindar too I have looked at, and wish he was better worth translating. I believe even the best

things are not equal to their fame. Perhaps it would be better to translate fame itself, — or is not that what the poets themselves do? However, I have not done with Pindar yet. I sent a long article on Etzler's book to the Democratic Review six weeks ago, which at length they have determined not to accept, as they could not subscribe to all the opinions, but asked for other matter, — purely literary, I suppose. O'Sullivan wrote me that articles of this kind have to be referred to the circle, who, it seems, are represented by this journal, and said something about "collective we," and "homogeneity."

Pray don't think of Bradbury and Soden any more, —

"For good deed done through praiera
Is sold and bought too dear, I wis,
To herte that of great valor is."

I see that they have given up their shop here.

Say to Mrs. E—— that I am glad to remember how she too dwells there in Concord, and shall send her anon some of the thoughts that belong to her. As for Edith, I seem to see a star in the east over where the young child is. Remember me to Mrs. B——.

Your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. E.

STATEN ISLAND, October 16, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—

I promised you some thoughts long ago, but it would be hard to tell whether these are the ones. I suppose that the great questions of "Fate, Free-will, Foreknowledge absolute," which used to be discussed at Concord, are still unsettled. And here comes Channing, with his "Present," to vex the world again, — a rather galvanic movement, I think. However, I like the man all the better, though his schemes the less. I am sorry for his confessions. Faith never makes a confession.

Have you had the annual berrying party, or sat on the Cliffs a whole day this summer? I suppose the flowers have fared quite as well since I was not there to scoff at them; and the hens, without doubt, keep up their reputation.

I have been reading lately what of Quarles's poetry I could get. He was a contemporary of Herbert, and a kindred spirit. I think you would like him. It is rare to find one who was so much of a poet and so little of an artist. He wrote long poems, almost epics for length, about Jonah, Esther, Job, Samson, and Solomon, interspersed with meditations after a quite original plan, — Shepherd's Oracles, Comedies, Romances, Fancies, and Meditations, — the quintessence of meditation, — and Enchiridions of Meditation all divine, —

and what he calls his Morning Muse; besides prose works as curious as the rest. He was an unwearied Christian, and a reformer of some old school withal. Hopelessly quaint, as if he lived all alone and knew nobody but his wife, who appears to have revered him. He never doubts his genius; it is only he and his God in all the world. He uses language sometimes as greatly as Shakespeare; and though there is not much straight grain in him, there is plenty of tough, crooked timber. In an age when Herbert is revived, Quarles surely ought not to be forgotten.

I will copy a few such sentences, as I should read to you if there. Mrs. Brown, too, may find some nutriment in them.

How does the Saxon Edith do? Can you tell yet to which school of philosophy she belongs, — whether she will be a fair saint of some Christian order, or a follower of Plato and the heathen? Bid Ellen a good night or a good morning from me, and see if she will remember where it comes from; and remember me to Mrs. B——, and your mother, and E—— H——.

Your friend,

HENRY.

TO MRS. THOREAU.

STATEN ISLAND, July 7, 1843.

DEAR MOTHER: —

I was very glad to get your letter and papers. Tell father that circumstantial letters make very substantial reading, at any rate. I like to know even how the sun shines and the garden grows with you. Tell Sophia that I have pressed some blossoms of the tulip-tree for her. They look somewhat like white lilies.

Pray, have you the seventeen-year locust in Concord? The air here is filled with their din. They come out of the ground at first in an imperfect state, and, crawling up the shrubs and plants, the perfect insect bursts out through the back. They are doing great damage to the fruit and forest trees. The latter are covered with dead twigs, which in the distance look like the blossoms of the chestnut. They bore every twig of last year's growth in order to deposit their eggs in it. In a few weeks the eggs will be hatched, and the worms fall to the ground and enter it, and in 1860 make their appearance again. I conversed about their coming this season before they arrived. They do no injury to the leaves, but, beside boring the twigs, suck their sap for sustenance. Their din is heard by those who sail along the shore from the distant woods. Phar-r-r-ah. Phar-r-r-ah. They are departing now. Dogs,

cats, and chickens subsist mainly upon them in some places.

I have not been to New York for more than three weeks. I have had an interesting letter from Mr. Lane, describing their new prospects. My pupil and I are getting on apace. He is remarkably well advanced in Latin, and is well advancing.

Your letter has just arrived. I was not aware that it was so long since I wrote home; I only knew that I had sent five or six letters to the town. It is very refreshing to hear from you, though it is not all good news. But I trust that Stearns Wheeler is not dead. I should be slow to believe it. He was made to work very well in this world. There need be no tragedy in his death.

The demon which is said to haunt the Jones family, hovering over their eyelids with wings steeped in juice of poppies, has commenced another campaign against me. I am "clear Jones" in this respect at least. But he finds little encouragement in my atmosphere, I assure you, for I do not once fairly lose myself, except in those hours of truce allotted to rest by immemorial custom. However, this skirmishing interferes sadly with my literary projects, and I am apt to think it a good day's work if I maintain a soldier's eye till night-fall. Very well, it does not matter much in what wars we serve, whether in the Highlands or the Lowlands. Everywhere we get soldiers' pay still

Give my love to Aunt Louisa, whose benignant face I sometimes see right in the wall, as naturally and necessarily shining on my path as some star of unaccountably greater age and higher orbit than myself. Let it be inquired by her of George Minott, as from me, — for she sees him, — if he has seen any pigeons yet, and tell him there are plenty of jack-snipes here. As for William P., the “worthy young man,” as I live, my eyes have not fallen on him yet.

I have not had the influenza, though here are its head-quarters, — unless my first week’s cold was it. Tell Helen I shall write to her soon. I have heard Lucretia Mott. This is badly written; but the worse the writing the sooner you get it this time from

Your affectionate son,

H. D. T.

TO MISS THOREAU.

STATEN ISLAND, July 21, 1843

DEAR HELEN; —

I have pretty much explored this island, inland and along the shore, finding my health inclined me to the peripatetic philosophy. I have visited Telegraph Stations, Sailors’ Snug Harbors, Seaman’s Retreats, Old Elm-Trees, where the Huguenots landed, Britton’s Mills, and all the vil-

lages on the island. Last Sunday I walked over to Lake Island Farm, eight or nine miles from here, where Moses Prichard lived, and found the present occupant, one Mr. Davenport, formerly from Massachusetts, with three or four men to help him, raising sweet potatoes and tomatoes by the acre. It seemed a cool and pleasant retreat, but a hungry soil. As I was coming away, I took my toll out of the soil in the shape of arrow-heads, which may after all be the surest crop, certainly not affected by drought.

I am well enough situated here to observe one aspect of the modern world at least. I mean the migratory, — the Western movement. Sixteen hundred immigrants arrived at quarantine ground on the 4th of July, and more or less every day since I have been here. I see them occasionally washing their persons and clothes, or men, women, and children gathered on an isolated quay near the shore, stretching their limbs and taking the air; the children running races and swinging on this artificial piece of the land of liberty, while their vessels are undergoing purification. They are detained but a day or two, and then go up to the city, for the most part without having *landed* here.

In the city I have seen since I wrote last, — W. H. Channing, at whose house, in Fifteenth Street, I spent a few pleasant hours, discussing the all-absorbing question “what to do for the

race." (He is sadly in earnest about going up the river to rusticate for six weeks, and issues a new periodical called "The Present" in September.) Also Horace Greeley, editor of the "Tribune," who is cheerfully in earnest, at his office of all work, a hearty New Hampshire boy as one would wish to meet, and says, "Now be neighborly," and believes only, or mainly, first, in the Sylvania Association, somewhere in Pennsylvania; and, secondly, and most of all, in a new association to go into operation soon in New Jersey, with which he is connected. Edward Palmer came down to see me Sunday before last. As for W—— and T——, we have strangely dodged one another, and have not met for some weeks.

I believe I have not told you anything about Lucretia Mott. It was a good while ago that I heard her at the Quaker Church in Hester Street. She is a preacher, and it was advertised that she would be present on that day. I liked all the proceedings very well, their plainly greater harmony and sincerity, than elsewhere. They do nothing in a hurry. Every one that walks up the aisle in his square coat and expansive hat has a history, and comes from a house to a house. The women come in one after another in their Quaker bonnets and handkerchiefs, looking all like sisters or so many chickadees. At length, after a long silence — waiting for the Spirit — Mrs. Mott rose, took off her bonnet, and began to utter very

deliberately what the Spirit suggested. Her self-possession was something to say, if all else failed; but it did not. Her subject was, "The Abuse of the Bible," and thence she straightway digressed to slavery and the degradation of woman. It was a good speech, — transcendentalism in its mildest form. She sat down at length, and, after a long and decorous silence, in which some seemed to be really digesting her words, the elders shook hands, and the meeting dispersed. On the whole, I liked their ways and the plainness of their meeting-house. It looked as if it was indeed made for service.

I think that Stearns Wheeler has left a gap in the community not easy to be filled. Though he did not exhibit the highest qualities of the scholar, he promised, in a remarkable degree, many of the essential and rarer ones; and his patient industry and energy, his reverent love of letters, and his proverbial accuracy, will cause him to be associated in my memory even with many venerable names of former days. It was not wholly unfit that so pure a lover of books should have ended his pilgrimage at the great book-mart of the world. I think of him as healthy and brave, and am confident that if he had lived, he would have proved useful in more ways than I can describe. He would have been authority on all matters of fact, and a sort of connecting link between men and scholars of different walks and tastes. The liter

ary enterprises he was planning for himself and friends, remind me of an older and more studious time. So much, then, remains for us to do who survive. Tell all my friends in Concord that I do not send my love, but retain it still.

Your affectionate brother,

H. D. T.

TO MRS. THOREAU.

STATEN ISLAND, August 6, 1848.

DEAR MOTHER:—

I am chiefly indebted to your letters for what I have learned of Concord and family news, and am very glad when I get one. I should have liked to be in Walden woods with you, but not with the railroad. I think of you all very often, and wonder if you are still separated from me only by so many miles of earth, or so many miles of memory. This life we live is a strange dream, and I don't believe at all any account men give of it. Methinks I should be content to sit at the back-door in Concord, under the poplar-tree, henceforth forever. Not that I am homesick at all—for places are strangely indifferent to me—but Concord is still a cynosure to my eyes, and I find it hard to attach it, even in imagination, to the rest of the globe, and tell where the seam is.

I fancy that this Sunday evening you are poring over some select book, almost transcendental perchance, or else "Burgh's Dignity," or Massillon, or the Christian Examiner. Father has just taken one more look at the garden, and is now absorbed in Chaptelle, or reading the newspaper quite abstractedly, only looking up occasionally over his spectacles to see how the rest are engaged, and not to miss any newer news that may not be in the paper. H—— has slipped in for the fourth time to learn the very latest item. S——, I suppose, is at Bangor; but Aunt L——, without doubt, is just flitting away to some good meeting, to save the credit of you all.

It is still a cardinal virtue with me to keep awake. I find it impossible to write or read except at rare intervals, but am, generally speaking, tougher than formerly. I could make a pedestrian tour round the world, and sometimes think it would perhaps be better to do at once the things I *can*, rather than be trying to do what at present I cannot do well. However, I shall awake sooner or later.

I have been translating some Greek, and reading English poetry, and a month ago sent a paper to the Democratic Review, which, at length, they were sorry they could not accept; but they could not adopt the sentiments. However, they were very polite, and earnest that I should send them something else, or reform that.

I go moping about the fields and woods here as I did in Concord, and, it seems, am thought to be a surveyor, — an Eastern man inquiring narrowly into the condition and value of land, &c. here, preparatory to an extensive speculation. One neighbor observed to me, in a mysterious and half inquisitive way, that he supposed I must be pretty well acquainted with the state of things; that I kept pretty close: he didn't see any surveying instruments, but perhaps I had them in my pocket.

I have received H——'s note, but have not heard of F—— H—— yet. She is a faint-hearted writer who could not take the responsibility of blotting one sheet alone. However, I like very well the blottings I get. Tell her I have not seen Mrs. Child nor Mrs. Sedgwick.

Love to all from

Your affectionate son,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MISS THOREAU.

STATEN ISLAND, October 18, 1843.

DEAR H——:—

What do you mean by saying that "*we* have written eight times by private opportunity?" Isn't it the more the better? And am I not glad of it? But people have a habit of not let-

ting me know it when they go to Concord from New York. I endeavored to get you "The Present" when I was last in the city, but they were all sold; and now another is out, which I will send, if I get it. I did not send the Democratic Review, because I had no copy, and my piece was not worth fifty cents. You think that Channing's words would apply to me too, as living more in the natural than the moral world; but I think that you mean the world of men and women rather, and reformers generally. My objection to the Editors and all that fraternity is, that they need and deserve sympathy themselves rather than are able to render it to others. They want faith, and mistake their private ail for an infected atmosphere; but let any one of them recover hope for a moment, and right his *particular* grievance, and he will no longer train in that company. To speak or do anything that shall concern mankind, one must speak and act as if well, or from that grain of health which he has left. This "Present" book indeed is blue, but the hue of its thoughts is yellow. I say these things with the less hesitation, because I have the jaundice myself; but I also know what it is to be well. But do not think that one can escape from mankind who is one of them, and is so constantly dealing with them.

I could not undertake to form a nucleus of an institution for the development of infant minds,

where none already existed. It would be too cruel. And then, as if looking all this while one way with benevolence, to walk off another about one's own affairs suddenly! Something of this kind is an unavoidable objection to that.

I am very sorry to hear such bad news about Aunt M——; but I think that the worst is always the least to be apprehended, for nature is averse to it as well as we. I trust to hear that she is quite well soon. I send love to her and Aunt J——. For three months I have not known whether to think of Sophia as in Bangor or Concord, and now you say that she is going directly. Tell her to write to me, and establish her whereabouts, and also to get well directly. And see that she has something worthy to do when she gets down there, for that's the best remedy for disease.

Your affectionate brother,

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, March 27, 1848.

I AM glad to hear that any words of mine, though spoken so long ago that I can hardly claim identity with their author, have reached you. It gives me pleasure, because I have there-

fore reason to suppose that I have uttered what concerns men, and that it is not in vain that man speaks to man. This is the value of literature. Yet those days are so distant, in every sense, that I have had to look at that page again, to learn what was the tenor of my thoughts then. I should value that article, however, if only because it was the occasion of your letter.

I do believe that the outward and the inward life correspond ; that if any should succeed to live a higher life, others would not know of it ; that difference and distance are one. To set about living a true life is to go a journey to a distant country, gradually to find ourselves surrounded by new scenes and men ; and as long as the old are around me, I know that I am not in any true sense living a new or a better life. The outward is only the outside of that which is within. Men are not concealed under habits, but are revealed by them ; they are their true clothes. I care not how curious a reason they may give for their abiding by them. Circumstances are not rigid and unyielding, but our habits are rigid. We are apt to speak vaguely sometimes, as if a divine life were to be grafted on to or built over this present as a suitable foundation. This might do if we could so build over our old life as to exclude from it all the warmth of our affection, and addle it, as the thrush builds over the cuckoo's egg, and lays her own atop, and hatches that only ; but the fact

is, we — so there is the partition — hatch them both, and the cuckoo's always by a day first, and that young bird crowds the young thrushes out of the nest. No. Destroy the cuckoo's egg, or build a new nest.

Change is change. No new life occupies the old bodies; — they decay. *It* is born, and grows, and flourishes. Men very pathetically inform the old, accept and wear it. Why put up with the almshouse when you may go to Heaven? It is embalming, — no more. Let alone your ointments and your linen swathes, and go into an infant's body. You see in the catacombs of Egypt the result of that experiment, — that is the end of it.

I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest man thinks he must attend to in a day; how singular an affair he thinks he must omit. When the mathematician would solve a difficult problem, he first frees the equation of all encumbrances, and reduces it to its simplest terms. So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run. I would stand upon facts. Why not see, — use our eyes? Do men know nothing? I know many men who, in common things, are not to be deceived; who trust no moonshine; who count their money correctly, and know how to invest it; who are said to be prudent and knowing, who yet will stand at a desk the

greater part of their lives, as cashiers in banks, and glimmer and rust and finally go out there. If they *know* anything, what under the sun do they do that for? Do they know what *bread* is? or what it is for? Do they know what life is? If they *knew* something, the places which know them now would know them no more forever.

This, our respectable daily life, in which the man of common sense, the Englishman of the world, stands so squarely, and on which our institutions are founded, is in fact the veriest illusion, and will vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision; but that faint glimmer of reality which sometimes illuminates the darkness of daylight for all men, reveals something more solid and enduring than adamant, which is in fact the corner-stone of the world.

Men cannot conceive of a state of things so fair that it cannot be realized. Can any man honestly consult his experience and say that it is so? Have we any facts to appeal to when we say that our dreams are premature? Did you ever hear of a man who had striven all his life faithfully and singly toward an object and in no measure obtained it? If a man constantly aspires, is he not elevated? Did ever a man try heroism, magnanimity, truth, sincerity, and find that there was no advantage in them? that it was a vain endeavor? Of course we do not expect that our paradise will be a garden. We know not what we ask,

To look at literature ; — how many fine thoughts has every man had ! how few fine thoughts are expressed ! Yet we never have a fantasy so subtle and ethereal, but that *talent merely*, with more resolution and faithful persistency, after a thousand failures, might fix and engrave it in distinct and enduring words, and we should see that our dreams are the solidest facts that we know. But I speak not of dreams.

What can be expressed in words can be expressed in life.

My actual life is a fact, in view of which I have no occasion to congratulate myself ; but for my faith and aspiration I have respect. It is from these that I speak. Every man's position is in fact too simple to be described. I have sworn no oath. I have no designs on society, or Nature, or God. I am simply what I am, or I begin to be that. I *live* in the *present*. I only remember the past, and anticipate the future. I love to live. I love reform better than its modes. There is no history of how bad became better. I believe something, and there is nothing else but that. I know that I am. I know that another is who knows more than I, who takes interest in me, whose creature, and yet whose kindred, in one sense, am I. I know that the enterprise is worthy. I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news.

As for positions, combinations, and details, — what are they ? In clear weather, when we

look into the heavens, what do we see but the sky and the sun ?

If you would convince a man that he does wrong, do right. But do not care to convince him. Men will believe what they see. Let them see.

Pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life, as a dog does his master's chaise. Do what you love. Know your own bone: gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still. Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something. All fables, indeed, have their morals; but the innocent enjoy the story. Let nothing come between you and the light. Respect men as brothers only. When you travel to the Celestial City, carry no letter of introduction. When you knock, ask to see God, — none of the servants. In what concerns you much, do not think that you have companions: know that you are alone in the world.

Thus I write at random. I need to see you, and I trust I shall, to correct my mistakes. Perhaps you have some oracles for me.

HENRY THOREAU

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, May 2, 1848.

“ We must have our bread.” But what is our bread? Is it baker’s bread? Methinks it should be very *home-made* bread. What is our meat? Is it butcher’s meat? What is that which we *must* have? Is that bread which we are now earning sweet? Is it not bread which has been suffered to sour, and then been sweetened with an alkali, which has undergone the vinous, acetous, and sometimes the putrid fermentation, and then been whitened with vitriol? Is this the bread which we must have? Man must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, truly, but also by the sweat of his brain within his brow. The body can feed the body only. I have tasted but little bread in my life. It has been mere grub and provender for the most part. Of bread that nourished the brain and the heart, scarcely any. There is absolutely none even on the tables of the rich.

There is not one kind of food for all men. You must and you will feed those faculties which you exercise. The laborer whose body is weary does not require the same food with the scholar whose brain is weary. Men should not labor foolishly like brutes, but the brain and the body should always, or as much as possible, work and rest together, and then the work will be of such a kind

that when the body is hungry the brain will be hungry also, and the same food will suffice for both; otherwise the food which repairs the waste energy of the over-wrought body will oppress the sedentary brain, and the degenerate scholar will come to esteem all food vulgar, and all getting a living drudgery.

How shall we earn our bread is a grave question; yet it is a sweet and inviting question. Let us not shirk it, as is usually done. It is the most important and practical question which is put to man. Let us not answer it hastily. Let us not be content to get our bread in some gross, careless, and hasty manner. Some men go a-hunting, some a-fishing, some a-gaming, some to war; but none have so pleasant a time as they who in earnest seek to earn their bread. It is true actually as it is true really; it is true materially as it is true spiritually, that they who seek honestly and sincerely, with all their hearts and lives and strength, to earn their bread, do earn it, and it is sure to be very sweet to them. A very little bread, — a very few crumbs are enough, if it be of the right quality, for it is infinitely nutritious. Let each man, then, earn at least a crumb of bread for his body before he dies, and know the taste of it, — that it is identical with the bread of life, and that they both go down at one swallow.

Our bread need not ever be sour or hard to digest. What Nature is to the mind she is also to

the body. As she feeds my imagination, she will feed my body ; for what she says she means, and is ready to do. She is not simply beautiful to the poet's eye. Not only the rainbow and sunset are beautiful, but to be fed and clothed, sheltered and warmed aright, are equally beautiful and inspiring. There is not necessarily any gross and ugly fact which may not be eradicated from the life of man. We should endeavor practically in our lives to correct all the defects which our imagination detects. The heavens are as deep as our aspirations are high. So high as a tree aspires to grow, so high it will find an atmosphere suited to it. Every man should stand for a force which is perfectly irresistible. How can any man be weak who dares *to be* at all? Even the tenderest plants force their way up through the hardest earth, and the crevices of rocks ; but a man no material power can resist. What a wedge, what a beetle, what a catapult, is an *earnest* man ! What can resist him ?

It is a momentous fact that a man may be *good*, or he may be *bad* ; his life may be *true*, or it may be *false* ; it may be either a shame or a glory to him. The good man builds himself up ; the bad man destroys himself.

But whatever we do we must do confidently (if we are timid, let us, then, act timidly), not expecting more light, but having light enough. If we confidently expect more, then let us wait for it.

But what is this which we have? Have we not already waited? Is this the beginning of time? Is there a man who does not see clearly beyond, though only a hair's breadth beyond where he at any time stands?

If one hesitates in his path, let him not proceed. Let him respect his doubts, for doubts, too, may have some divinity in them. That we have but little faith is not sad, but that we have but little faithfulness. By faithfulness faith is earned. When, in the progress of a life, a man swerves, though only by an angle infinitely small, from his proper and allotted path (and this is never done quite unconsciously even at first; in fact, that was his broad and scarlet sin, — ah, he knew of it more than he can tell), then the drama of his life turns to tragedy, and makes haste to its fifth act. When once we thus fall behind ourselves, there is no accounting for the obstacles which rise up in our path, and no one is so wise as to advise, and no one so powerful as to aid us while we abide on that ground. Such are cursed with *duties*, and the *neglect of their duties*. For such the decalogue was made, and other far more voluminous and terrible codes.

These departures, — who have not made them? — for they are as faint as the parallax of a fixed star, and at the commencement we say they are nothing, — that is, they originate in a kind of sleep and forgetfulness of the soul when it is

naught. A man cannot be too circumspect in order to keep in the straight road, and be sure that he sees all that he may at any time see, that so he may distinguish his true path.

You ask if there is no doctrine of sorrow in my philosophy. Of acute sorrow I suppose that I know comparatively little. My saddest and most genuine sorrows are apt to be but transient regrets. The place of sorrow is supplied, perchance, by a certain hard and proportionably barren indifference. I am of kin to the sod, and partake largely of its dull patience, - in winter expecting the sun of spring.

In my cheapest moments I am apt to think that it is not my business to be "seeking the spirit," but as much its business to be seeking me.

I know very well what Goethe meant when he said that he never had a chagrin, but he made a poem out of it. I have altogether too much patience of this kind. I am too easily contented with a slight and almost animal happiness. My happiness is a good deal like that of the woodchucks.

Methinks I am never quite committed, never wholly the creature of my moods, being always to some extent their critic. My only integral experience is in my vision. I see, perchance, with more integrity than I feel.

But I need not tell you what manner of man I am, — my virtues or my vices. You can guess if

it is worth the while ; and I do not discriminate them well.

I do not write this time at my hut in the woods. I am at present living with Mrs. Emerson, whose house is an old home of mine, for company during Mr. E.'s absence.

You will perceive that I am as often talking to myself, perhaps, as speaking to you.

HENRY THOREAU

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, August 10, 1849.

MR. B——.—

I write now chiefly to say, before it is too late, that I shall be glad to see you in Concord, and will give you a chamber, &c., in my father's house, and as much of my poor company as you can bear.

I am in too great haste this time to speak to your, or out of my, condition. I might say, — you might say, — comparatively speaking, be not anxious to avoid poverty. In this way the wealth of the universe may be securely invested. What a pity if we do not live this short time according to the laws of the long time, — the eternal laws ! Let us see that we stand erect here, and do not lie along by our *whole length* in the dirt. Let our

meanness be our footstool, not our cushion. In the midst of this labyrinth let us live a *thread* of life. We must act with so rapid and resistless a purpose in *one* direction, that our vices will necessarily trail behind. The nucleus of a comet is almost a star. Was there ever a genuine dilemma? The laws of earth are for the feet, or inferior man; the laws of heaven are for the head, or superior man; the latter are the former sublimed and expanded, even as radii from the earth's centre go on diverging into space. Happy the man who observes the heavenly and the terrestrial law in just proportion; whose every faculty, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, obeys the law of its level; who neither stoops nor goes on tiptoe, but lives a balanced life, acceptable to nature and to God.

These things I say; other things I do.

I am sorry to hear that you did not receive my book earlier. I addressed it and left it in Munroe's shop to be sent to you immediately, on the twenty-sixth of May, before a copy had been sold.

Will you remember me to Mr. — when you see him next: he is well remembered by

HENRY THOREAU.

I still owe you a worthy answer.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, November 20, 1849.

MR. B—— : —

I have not forgotten that I am your debtor. When I read over your letters, as I have just done, I feel that I am unworthy to have received or to answer them, though they are addressed, as I would have them, to the ideal of me. It behoves me, if I would reply, to speak out of the rarest part of myself.

At present I am subsisting on certain wild flavors which nature wafts to me, which unaccountably sustain me, and make my apparently poor life rich. Within a year my walks have extended themselves, and almost every afternoon (I read, or write, or make pencils in the forenoon, and by the last means get a living for my body) I visit some new hill, or pond, or wood, many miles distant. I am astonished at the wonderful retirement through which I move, rarely meeting a man in these excursions, never seeing one similarly engaged, unless it be my companion, when I have one. I cannot help feeling that of all the human inhabitants of nature hereabouts, only we two have leisure to admire and enjoy our inheritance.

“Free in this world as the birds in the air, disengaged from every kind of chains, those who have practised the *yoga* gather in Brahma the certain fruit of their works.”

Depend upon it, that, rude and careless as I am, I would fain practise the *yoga* faithfully.

“The yogi, absorbed in contemplation, contributes in his degree to creation: he breathes a divine perfume, he hears wonderful things. Divine forms traverse him without tearing him, and, united to the nature which is proper to him, he goes, he acts as animating original matter.”

To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi.

I know little about the affairs of Turkey, but I am sure that I know something about barberries and chestnuts, of which I have collected a store this fall. When I go to see my neighbor, he will formally communicate to me the latest news from Turkey, which he read in yesterday's mail, — “Now Turkey by this time looks determined, and Lord Palmerston —” Why, I would rather talk of the bran, which, unfortunately, was sifted out of my bread this morning, and thrown away. It is a fact which lies nearer to me. The newspaper gossip with which our hosts abuse our ears is as far from a true hospitality as the viands which they set before us. We did not need them to feed our bodies, and the news can be bought for a penny. We want the inevitable news, be it sad or cheering, wherefore and by what means they are extant this *new* day. If they are well, let them whistle and dance; if they are dyspeptic, it is their duty to complain, that so they may in any

case be *entertaining*. If words were invented to conceal thought, I think that newspapers are a great improvement or a bad invention. Do not suffer your life to be taken by newspapers.

I thank you for your hearty appreciation of my book. I am glad to have had such a long talk with you, and that you had patience to listen to me to the end. I think that I had the advantage of you, for I chose my own mood, and in one sense your mood too, — that is, a quiet and attentive reading mood. Such advantage has the writer over the talker. I am sorry that you did not come to Concord in your vacation. Is it not time for another vacation? I am here yet, and Concord is here.

You will have found out by this time who it is that writes this, and will be glad to have you write to him, without his subscribing himself

HENRY D. THOREAU.

P. S. — It is so long since I have seen you, that, as you will perceive, I have to speak, as it were, *in vacuo*, as if I were sounding hollowly for an echo, and it did not make much odds what kind of a sound I made. But the gods do not hear any rude or discordant sound, as we learn from the echo; and I know that the nature toward which I launch these sounds is so rich, that it will modulate anew and wonderfully improve my rudest strain.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, April 3, 1850.

MR. B—— : —

I thank you for your letter, and I will endeavor to record some of the thoughts which it suggests, whether pertinent or not. You speak of poverty and dependence. Who are poor and dependent? Who are rich and independent? When was it that men agreed to respect the appearance and not the reality? Why should the appearance *appear*? Are we well acquainted, then, with the reality? There is none who does not lie hourly in the respect he pays to false appearance. How sweet it would be to treat men and things, for an hour, for just what they are! We wonder that the sinner does not confess his sin. When we are weary with travel, we lay down our load and rest by the wayside. So, when we are weary with the burden of life, why do we not lay down this load of falsehoods which we have volunteered to sustain, and be refreshed as never mortal was? Let the beautiful laws prevail. Let us not weary ourselves by resisting them. When we would rest our bodies we cease to support them; we recline on the lap of earth. So, when we would rest our spirits, we must recline on the Great Spirit. Let things alone; let them weigh what they will; let them soar or fall. To succeed in letting only one thing alone in a winter morning,

if it be only one poor, frozen-thawed apple that hangs on a tree, what a glorious achievement! Methinks it lightens through the dusky universe. What an infinite wealth we have discovered! God reigns, i. e. when we take a liberal view, — when a liberal view is presented us.

Let God alone if need be. Methinks, if I loved him more, I should keep him, — I should keep myself rather, — at a more respectful distance. It is not when I am going to meet him, but when I am just turning away and leaving him alone, that I discover that God is. I say, God. I am not sure that that is the name. You will know whom I mean.

If for a moment we make way with our petty selves, wish no ill to anything, apprehend no ill, cease to be but as the crystal which reflects a ray, — what shall we not reflect! What a universe will appear crystallized and radiant around us!

I should say, let the muse lead the muse, — let the understanding lead the understanding, though in any case it is the farthest forward which leads them both. If the muse accompany, she is no muse, but an amusement. The muse should lead like a star which is very far off; but that does not imply that we are to follow foolishly, falling into sloughs and over precipices, for it is not foolishness, but understanding, which is to follow, which the muse is appointed to lead, as a fit guide of a fit follower.

Will you live? or will you be embalmed? Will you live, though it be astride of a sunbeam; or will you repose safely in the catacombs for a thousand years? In the former case, the worst accident that can happen is that you may break your neck. Will you break your heart, your soul, to save your neck? Necks and pipe-stems are fated to be broken. Men make a great ado about the folly of demanding too much of life (or of eternity?), and of endeavoring to live according to that demand. It is much ado about nothing. No harm ever came from that quarter. I am not afraid that I shall exaggerate the value and significance of life, but that I shall not be up to the occasion which it is. I shall be sorry to remember that I was there, but noticed nothing remarkable,—not so much as a prince in disguise; lived in the golden age a hired man; visited Olympus even, but fell asleep after dinner, and did not hear the conversation of the gods. I lived in Judæa eighteen hundred years ago, but I never knew that there was such a one as Christ among my contemporaries! If there is anything more glorious than a congress of men a-framing or amending of a constitution going on, which I suspect there is, I desire to see the morning papers. I am greedy of the faintest rumor, though it were got by listening at the key-hole. I will dissipate myself in that direction.

I am glad to know that you find what I have

said on Friendship worthy of attention. I wish I could have the benefit of your criticism; it would be a rare help to me. Will you not communicate it?

HENRY D. THOREAU

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, May 28, 1850.

MR. B——:—

“I never found any contentment in the life which the newspapers record,”—anything of more value than the cent which they cost. Contentment in being covered with dust an inch deep! We who walk the streets, and hold time together, are but the refuse of ourselves, and that life is for the shells of us,—of our body and our mind,—for our scurf,—a thoroughly *scurvy* life. It is coffee made of coffee-grounds the twentieth time, which was only coffee the first time,—while the living water leaps and sparkles by our doors. I know some who, in their charity, give their coffee-grounds to the poor! We, demanding news, and putting up with *such* news! Is it a new convenience, or a new accident, or, rather, a new perception of the truth that we want!

You say that “the serene hours in which friendship, books, nature, thought, seem alone primary

considerations, visit you but faintly." Is not the attitude of expectation somewhat divine? — a sort of home-made divineness? Does it not compel a kind of sphere-music to attend on it? And do not its satisfactions merge at length, by insensible degrees, in the enjoyment of the thing expected?

What if I should forget to write about my not writing? It is not worth the while to make that a theme. It is as if I had written every day. It is as if I had never written before. I wonder that you think so much about it, for not writing is the most like writing, in my case, of anything I know.

Why will you not relate to me your dream? That would be to realize it somewhat. You tell me that you dream, but not what you dream. I can *guess* what comes to pass. So do the frogs dream. Would that I knew what. I have never found out whether they are awake or asleep, — whether it is day or night with them.

I am preaching, mind you, to bare walls, that is, to myself; and if you have chanced to come in and occupy a pew, do not think that my remarks are directed at you particularly, and so slam the seat in disgust. This discourse was written long before these exciting times.

Some absorbing employment on your higher ground, — your upland farm, — whither no cart-path leads, but where you mount alone with your hoe, — where the life everlasting grows; there you raise a crop which needs not to be brought

down into the valley to a market; which you barter for heavenly products.

Do you separate distinctly enough the support of your body, from that of your essence? By how distinct a course commonly are these two ends attained! Not that they should not be attained by one and the same means, — that, indeed, is the rarest success, — but there is no half and half about it.

I shall be glad to read my lecture to a small audience in Worcester such as you describe, and will only require that my expenses be paid. If only the parlor be large enough for an echo, and the audience will embarrass themselves with hearing as much as the lecturer would otherwise embarrass himself with reading. But I warn you that this is no better calculated for a promiscuous audience than the last two which I read to you. It requires, in every sense, a concordant audience.

I will come on next — and spend Sunday with you if you wish it. Say so if you do.

“Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.”

Be not deterred by melancholy on the path which leads to immortal health and joy. When they tasted of the water of the river over which they were to go, they thought it tasted a little bitterish to the palate, but it proved sweeter when it was down.

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, August 9, 1850.

MR. B—— : —

I received your letter just as I was rushing to Fire Island beach to recover what remained of Margaret Fuller, and read it on the way. That event and its train, as much as anything, have prevented my answering it before. It is wisest to speak when you are spoken to. I will now endeavor to reply, at the risk of having nothing to say.

I find that actual events, notwithstanding the singular prominence which we all allow them, are far less real than the creations of my imagination. They are truly visionary and insignificant, — all that we commonly call life and death, — and affect me less than my dreams. This petty stream which from time to time swells and carries away the mills and bridges of our habitual life, and that mightier stream or ocean on which we securely float, — what makes the difference between them? I have in my pocket a button which I ripped off the coat of the Marquis of Ossoli, on the sea-shore, the other day. Held up, it intercepts the light, — an actual button, — and yet all the life it is connected with is less substantial to me, and interests me less, than my faintest dream. Our thoughts are the epochs in our lives: all else is but as a journal of the winds that blew while we were here.

I say to myself, 'Do a little more of that work which you have confessed to be good. You are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with yourself, without reason. Have you not a thinking faculty of inestimable value? If there is an experiment which you would like to try, try it. Do not entertain doubts if they are not agreeable to you. Remember that you need not eat unless you are hungry. Do not read the newspapers. Improve every opportunity to be melancholy. As for health, consider yourself well. Do not engage to find things as you think they are. Do what nobody else can do for you. Omit to do anything else. It is not easy to make our lives respectable by any course of activity. We must repeatedly withdraw into our shells of thought, like the tortoise, somewhat helplessly; yet there is more than philosophy in that.

Do not waste any reverence on my attitude. I merely manage to sit up where I have dropped. I am sure that my acquaintances mistake me. They ask my advice on high matters, but they do not know even how poorly on't I am for hats and shoes. I have hardly a shift. Just as shabby as I am in my outward apparel, ay, and more lamentably shabby am I in my inward substance. If I should turn myself inside out, my rags and meanness would indeed appear. I am something to him that made me, undoubtedly, but not much to any other that he has made.

Would it not be worth while to discover nature in Milton? be native to the universe? I, too, love Concord best, but I am glad when I discover, in oceans and wildernesses far away, the material of a million Concord: indeed, I am lost, unless I discover them. I see less difference between a city and a swamp than formerly. It is a swamp, however, too dismal and dreary even for me, and I should be glad if there were fewer owls, and frogs, and mosquitoes in it. I prefer ever a more cultivated place, free from miasma and crocodiles. I am so sophisticated, and I will take my choice.

As for missing friends, — what if we do miss one another? have we not agreed on a rendezvous? While each wanders his own way through the wood, without anxiety, ay, with serene joy, though it be on his hands and knees, over rocks and fallen trees, he cannot but be in the right way. There is no wrong way to him. How can he be said to miss his friend, whom the fruits still nourish and the elements sustain? A man who missed his friend at a turn, went on buoyantly, dividing the friendly air, and humming a tune to himself, ever and anon kneeling with delight to study each little lichen in his path, and scarcely made three miles a day for friendship. As for conforming outwardly, and living your own life inwardly, I do not think much of that. Let not your right hand know what your left hand does in that line of business. It will prove a failure.

Just as successfully can you walk against a sharp steel edge which divides you cleanly right and left. Do you wish to try your ability to resist distension? It is a greater strain than any soul can long endure. When you get God to pulling one way, and the devil the other, each having his feet well braced, — to say nothing of the conscience sawing transversely, — almost any timber will give way.

I do not dare invite you earnestly to come to Concord, because I know too well that the berries are not thick in my fields, and we should have to take it out in viewing the landscape. But come, on every account, and we will see — one another.

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO SOPHIA THOREAU.

CONCORD, July 13, 1852.

DEAR SOPHIA : —

I am not on the trail of any elephants or mastodons, but have succeeded in trapping only a few ridiculous mice, which cannot feed my imagination. I have become sadly scientific. I would rather come upon the vast valley-like "spore" only of some celestial beast which this world's woods can no longer sustain, than spring my net over a bushel of moles. You must do better in

those woods where you are. You must have some adventures to relate and repeat for years to come, which will eclipse even mother's voyage to Goldsborough and Sissiboo.

Concord is just as idiotic as ever in relation to the spirits and their knockings. Most people here believe in a spiritual world which no respectable junk bottle, which had not met with a slip, would condescend to contain even a portion of for a moment,— whose atmosphere would extinguish a candle let down into it, like a well that wants airing; in spirits which the very bull-frogs in our meadows would blackball. Their evil genius is seeing how low it can degrade them. The hooting of owls, the croaking of frogs is celestial wisdom in comparison. If I could be brought to believe in the things which they believe, I should make haste to get rid of my certificate of stock in this and the next world's enterprises, and buy a share in the first Immediate Annihilation Company that offered. I would exchange my immortality for a glass of small beer this hot weather. Where *are* the heathen? Was there ever any superstition before? And yet I suppose there may be a vessel this very moment setting sail from the coast of North America to that of Africa with a missionary on board! Consider the dawn and the sunrise,— the rainbow and the evening,— the words of Christ and the aspirations of all the saints! **H**ear music! see, smell,

taste, feel, hear, — anything, — and then hear these idiots, inspired by the cracking of a restless board, humbly asking, “Please, Spirit, if you cannot answer by knocks, answer by tips of the table.” ! ! ! ! !

Yours,

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, July 21, 1852.

MR. B——:—

I am too stupidly well these days to write to you. My life is almost altogether outward, — all shell and no tender kernel; so that I fear the report of it would be only a nut for you to crack, with no meat in it for you to eat. Moreover, you have not cornered me up, and I enjoy such large liberty in writing to you, that I feel as vague as the air. However, I rejoice to hear that you have attended so patiently to anything which I have said heretofore, and have detected any truth in it. It encourages me to say more, — not in this letter, I fear, but in some book which I may write one day. I am glad to know that I am as much to any mortal as a persistent and consistent scarecrow is to a farmer, — such a bundle of straw in a man’s clothing as I am, with a few bits of tin to sparkle in the sun dangling about me, as if I were

hard at work there in the field. However, if this kind of life saves any man's corn, — why, he is the gainer. I am not afraid that you will flatter me as long as you know what I am, as well as what I think, or aim to be, and distinguish between these two, for then it will commonly happen that if you praise the last you will condemn the first.

I remember that walk to Asneburnskit very well, — a fit place to go to on a Sunday; one of the true temples of the earth. A temple, you know, was anciently “an open place without a roof,” whose walls served merely to shut out the world and direct the mind toward heaven; but a modern *meeting-house* shuts out the heavens, while it crowds the world into still closer quarters. Best of all is it when, as on a mountain-top, you have for all walls your own elevation and deeps of surrounding ether. The partridge-berries, watered with mountain dews which are gathered there, are more memorable to me than the words which I last heard from the pulpit at least; and for my part, I would rather look toward Rutland than Jerusalem. Rutland, — modern town, — land of ruts, — trivial and worn, — not too sacred, — with no holy sepulchre, but profane green fields and dusty roads, and opportunity to live as holy a life as you can, — where the sacredness, if there is any, is all in yourself and not in the place.

I fear that your Worcester people do not often enough go to the hill-tops, though, as I am told,

the springs lie nearer to the surface on your hills than in your valleys. They have the reputation of being Free-Soilers. Do they insist on a free atmosphere too, that is, on freedom for the head or brain as well as the feet? If I were consciously to join any party, it would be that which is the most free to entertain thought.

All the world complain now-a-days of a press of trivial duties and engagements, which prevents their employing themselves on some higher ground they know of; but, undoubtedly, if they were made of the right stuff to work on that higher ground, provided they were released from all those engagements, they would now at once fulfil the superior engagement, and neglect all the rest, as naturally as they breathe. They would never be caught saying that they had no time for this, when the dullest man knows that this is all that he has time for. No man who acts from a sense of duty ever puts the lesser duty above the greater. No man has the desire and the ability to work on high things, but he has also the ability to build himself a high staging.

As for passing *through* any great and glorious experience, and rising *above* it, as an eagle might fly athwart the evening sky to rise into still brighter and fairer regions of the heavens, I cannot say that I ever sailed so creditably, but my bark ever seemed thwarted by some side wind, and went off over the edge, and now only occa-

sionally tacks back toward the centre of that sea again. I have outgrown nothing good, but, I do not fear to say, fallen behind by whole continents of virtue, which should have been passed as islands in my course ; but I trust — what else can I trust — that, with a stiff wind, some Friday, when I have thrown some of my cargo overboard, I may make up for all that distance lost.

Perchance the time will come when we shall not be content to go back and forth upon a raft to some huge Homeric or Shakespearian Indiaman that lies upon the reef, but build a bark out of that wreck and others that are buried in the sands of this desolate island, and such new timber as may be required, in which to sail away to whole new worlds of light and life, where our friends are.

Write again. There is one respect in which you did not finish your letter : you did not write it with ink, and it is not so good, therefore, against or for you in the eye of the law, nor in the eye of

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

September, 1852.

MR. B—— : —

Here come the sentences which I promised you. You may keep them, if you will regard and use

them as the disconnected fragments of what I may find to be a completer essay, on looking over my journal, at last, and may claim again.

I send you the thoughts on Chastity and Sensuality with diffidence and shame, not knowing how far I speak to the condition of men generally, or how far I betray my peculiar defects. Pray enlighten me on this point if you can.

LOVE.

What the essential difference between man and woman is that they should be thus attracted to one another, no one has satisfactorily answered. Perhaps we must acknowledge the justness of the distinction which assigns to man the sphere of wisdom, and to woman that of love, though neither belongs exclusively to either. Man is continually saying to woman, Why will you not be more wise? Woman is continually saying to man, Why will you not be more loving? It is not in their wills to be wise or to be loving; but, unless each is both wise and loving, there can be neither wisdom nor love.

All transcendent goodness is one, though appreciated in different ways, or by different senses. In beauty we see it, in music we hear it, in fragrance we scent it, in the palatable the pure palate tastes it, and in rare health the whole body feels it. The variety is in the surface or manifes

tation ; but the radical identity we fail to express. The lover sees in the glance of his beloved the same beauty that in the sunset paints the western skies. It is the same daimon, here lurking under a human eyelid, and there under the closing eyelids of the day. Here, in small compass, is the ancient and natural beauty of evening and morning. What loving astronomer has ever fathomed the ethereal depths of the eye ?

The maiden conceals a fairer flower and sweeter fruit than any calyx in the field ; and, if she goes with averted face, confiding in her purity and high resolves, she will make the heavens retrospective, and all nature humbly confess its queen.

Under the influence of this sentiment, man is a string of an *Æolian* harp, which vibrates with the zephyrs of the eternal morning.

There is at first thought something trivial in the commonness of love. So many Indian youths and maidens along these banks have in ages past yielded to the influence of this great civilizer. Nevertheless, this generation is not disgusted nor discouraged, for love is no individual's experience ; and though we are imperfect mediums, it does not partake of our imperfection ; though we are finite, it is infinite and eternal ; and the same divine influence broods over these banks, whatever race may inhabit them, and perchance still would, even if the human race did not dwell here.

Perhaps an instinct survives through the intens-

est actual love, which prevents entire abandonment and devotion, and makes the most ardent lover a little reserved. It is the anticipation of change. For the most ardent lover is not the less practically wise, and seeks a love which will last forever.

Considering how few poetical friendships there are, it is remarkable that so many are married. It would seem as if men yielded too easy an obedience to nature without consulting their genius. One may be drunk with love without being any nearer to finding his mate. There is more of good nature than of good sense at the bottom of most marriages. But the good nature must have the counsel of the good spirit or Intelligence. If common sense had been consulted, how many marriages would never have taken place; if uncommon or divine sense, how few marriages such as we witness would ever have taken place!

Our love may be ascending or descending. What is its character, if it may be said of it, —

“ We must *respect* the souls above,
But only *those below* we love.”

Love is a severe critic. Hate can pardon more than love. They who aspire to love worthily, subject themselves to an ordeal more rigid than any other.

Is your friend such a one that an increase of worth on your part will rarely make her more your friend? Is she retained, — is she attracted,

— by more nobleness in you, — by more of that virtue which is peculiarly yours; or is she indifferent and blind to that? Is she to be flattered and won by your meeting her on any other than the ascending path? Then duty requires that you separate from her.

Love must be as much a light as a flame.

Where there is not discernment, the behavior even of the purest soul may in effect amount to coarseness.

A man of fine perceptions is more truly feminine than a merely sentimental woman. The heart is blind; but love is not blind. None of the gods is so discriminating.

In love and friendship the imagination is as much exercised as the heart; and if either is outraged the other will be estranged. It is commonly the imagination which is wounded first, rather than the heart, — it is so much the more sensitive.

Comparatively, we can excuse any offence against the heart, but not against the imagination. The imagination knows — nothing escapes its glance from out its eye — and it controls the breast. My heart may still yearn toward the valley, but my imagination will not permit me to jump off the precipice that debars me from it, for it is wounded, its wings are clipped, and it cannot fly, even descendingly. Our “blundering hearts!” some poet says. The imagination never forgets it is a re-member-

ing. It is not foundationless, but most reasonable, and it alone uses all the knowledge of the intellect.

Love is the profoundest of secrets. Divulged, even to the beloved, it is no longer Love. As if it were merely I that loved you. When love ceases, then it is divulged.

In our intercourse with one we love, we wish to have answered those questions at the end of which we do not raise our voice; against which we put no interrogation-mark, — answered with the same unflinching, universal aim toward every point of the compass.

I require that thou knowest everything without being told anything. I parted from my beloved because there was one thing which I had to tell her. She *questioned* me. She should have known all by sympathy. That I had to tell it her was the difference between us, — the misunderstanding.

A lover never hears anything that is *told*, for that is commonly either false or stale; but he hears things taking place, as the sentinels heard Trenc̄ mining in the ground, and thought it was moles.

The relation may be profaned in many ways. The parties may not regard it with equal sacredness. What if the lover should learn that his beloved dealt in incantations and philters! What if he should hear that she consulted a clairvoyant! The spell would be instantly broken.

If to chaffer and higgie are bad in trade, they are much worse in Love. It demands directness as of an arrow.

There is danger that we lose sight of what our friend is absolutely, while considering what she is to us alone.

The lover wants no partiality. He says, Be so kind as to be just.

Canst thou love with thy mind,
 And reason with thy heart?
 Canst thou be kind,
 And from thy darling part?

Can'st thou range earth, sea, and air,
 And so meet me everywhere?
 Through all events I will pursue thee,
 Through all persons I will woo thee.

I need thy hate as much as thy love. Thou wilt not repel me entirely when thou repellst what is evil in me.

Indeed, indeed, I cannot tell,
 Though I ponder on it well,
 Which were easier to state,
 All my love or all my hate.
 Surely, surely, thou wilt trust me
 When I say thou dost disgust me
 O I hate thee with a hate
 That would fain annihilate;
 Yet, sometimes, against my will,
 My dear Friend, I love thee still.
 It were treason to our love,
 And a sin to God above,
 One iota to abate
 Of a pure, impartial hate.

It is not enough that we are truthful ; we must cherish and carry out high purposes to be truthful about.

It must be rare, indeed, that we meet with one to whom we are prepared to be quite ideally related, as she to us. We should have no reserve ; we should give the whole of ourselves to that society ; we should have no duty aside from that. One who could bear to be so wonderfully and beautifully exaggerated every day. I would take my friend out of her low self and set her higher, infinitely higher, and *there* know her. But, commonly, men are as much afraid of love as of hate. They have lower engagements. They have near ends to serve. They have not imagination enough to be thus employed about a human being, but must be cooping a barrel, forsooth.

What a difference, whether, in all your walks, you meet only strangers, or in one house is one who knows you, and whom you know. To have a brother or a sister ! To have a gold mine on your farm ! To find diamonds in the gravel heaps before your door ! How rare these things are ! To share the day with you, — to people the earth. Whether to have a god or a goddess for companion in your walks, or to walk alone with hinds and villains and carles. Would not a friend enhance the beauty of the landscape as much as a deer or hare ? Everything would acknowledge and serve such a relation ; the corn in the field,

and the cranberries in the meadow. The flowers would bloom, and the birds sing, with a new impulse. There would be more fair days in the year.

The object of love expands and grows before us to eternity, until it includes all that is lovely, and we become all that can love.

CHASTITY AND SENSUALITY.

The subject of sex is a remarkable one, since, though its phenomena concern us so much, both directly and indirectly, and, sooner or later, it occupies the thoughts of all, yet all mankind, as it were, agree to be silent about it, at least the sexes commonly one to another. One of the most interesting of all human facts is veiled more completely than any mystery. It is treated with such secrecy and awe, as surely do not go to any religion. I believe that it is unusual even for the most intimate friends to communicate the pleasures and anxieties connected with this fact, much as the external affair of love, its comings and goings, are bruited. The Shakers do not exaggerate it so much by their manner of speaking of it, as all mankind by their manner of keeping silence about it. Not that men should speak on this or any subject without having anything worthy to say; but it is plain that the education of man has hardly commenced, — there is so little genuine intercommunication.

In a pure society, the subject of marriage would not be so often avoided from shame and not from reverence, winked out of sight, and hinted at only, but treated naturally and simply, — perhaps simply avoided, like the kindred mysteries. If it cannot be spoken of for shame, how can it be acted of? But, doubtless, there is far more purity, as well as more impurity, than is apparent.

Men commonly couple with their idea of marriage a slight degree at least of sensuality; but every lover, the world over, believes in its inconceivable purity.

If it is the result of a pure love, there can be nothing sensual in marriage. Chastity is something positive, not negative. It is the virtue of the married especially. All lusts or base pleasures must give place to loftier delights. They who meet as superior beings cannot perform the deeds of inferior ones. The deeds of love are less questionable than any action of an individual can be, for, it being founded on the rarest mutual respect, the parties incessantly stimulate each other to a loftier and purer life, and the act in which they are associated must be pure and noble indeed, for innocence and purity can have no equal. In this relation we deal with one whom we respect more religiously even than we respect our better selves, and we shall necessarily conduct as in the presence of God. What presence can

be more awful to the lover than the presence of his beloved ?

If you seek the warmth even of affection from a similar motive to that from which cats and dogs and slothful persons hug the fire, because your temperature is low through sloth, you are on the downward road, and it is but to plunge yet deeper into sloth. Better the cold affection of the sun, reflected from fields of ice and snow, or his warmth in some still wintry dell. The warmth of celestial love does not relax, but nerves and braces its enjoyer. Warm your body by healthful exercise, not by cowering over a stove. Warm your spirit by performing independently noble deeds, not by ignobly seeking the sympathy of your fellows who are no better than yourself. A man's social and spiritual discipline must answer to his corporeal. He must lean on a friend who has a hard breast, as he would lie on a hard bed. He must drink cold water for his only beverage. So he must not hear sweetened and colored words, but pure and refreshing truths. He must daily bathe in truth cold as spring water, not warmed by the sympathy of friends.

Can love be in aught allied to dissipation ? Let us love by refusing, not accepting one another. Love and lust are far asunder. The one is good, the other bad. When the affectionate sympathize by their higher natures, there is love ; but there is danger that they will sympathize by their lower

natures, and then there is lust. It is not necessary that this be deliberate, hardly even conscious; but, in the close contact of affection, there is danger that we may stain and pollute one another, for we cannot embrace but with an entire embrace.

We must love our friend so much that she shall be associated with our purest and holiest thoughts alone. When there is impurity, we have "descended to meet," though we knew it not.

The *luxury* of affection, — there's the danger. There must be some nerve and heroism in our love, as of a winter morning. In the religion of all nations a purity is hinted at, which, I fear, men never attain to. We may love and not elevate one another. The love that takes us as it finds us degrades us. What watch we must keep over the fairest and purest of our affections, lest there be some taint about them. May we so love as never to have occasion to repent of our love.

There is to be attributed to sensuality the loss to language of how many pregnant symbols? Flowers, which, by their infinite hues and fragrance, celebrate the marriage of the plants, are intended for a symbol of the open and unsuspected beauty of all true marriage, when man's flowering season arrives.

Virginity, too, is a budding flower, and by an impure marriage the virgin is deflowered. Whoever loves flowers, loves virgins and chastity.

Love and lust are as far asunder as a flower-garden is from a brothel.

J. Biberg, in the *Amœnitates Botanicae*, edited by Linnæus, observes (I translate from the Latin): "The organs of generation, which, in the animal kingdom, are for the most part concealed by Nature, as if they were to be ashamed of, in the vegetable kingdom are exposed to the eyes of all; and, when the nuptials of plants are celebrated, it is wonderful what delight they afford to the beholder, refreshing the senses with the most agreeable color and the sweetest odor; and, at the same time, bees and other insects, not to mention the humming-bird, extract honey from their nectaries, and gather wax from their effete pollen." Linnæus himself calls the calyx the *thalamus*, or bridal chamber; and the corolla the *aulæum*, or tapestry of it, and proceeds to explain thus every part of the flower.

Who knows but evil spirits might corrupt the flowers themselves, rob them of their fragrance and their fair hues, and turn their marriage into a secret shame and defilement? Already they are of various qualities, and there is one whose nuptials fill the lowlands in June with the odor of carrion.

The intercourse of the sexes, I have dreamed, is incredibly beautiful, too fair to be remembered. I have had thoughts about it, but they are among the most fleeting and irrecoverable in my experi-

ence. It is strange that men will talk of miracles, revelation, inspiration, and the like, as things past, while love remains.

A true marriage will differ in no wise from illumination. In all perception of the truth there is a divine ecstasy, an inexpressible delirium of joy, as when a youth embraces his betrothed virgin. The ultimate delights of a true marriage are one with this.

No wonder that, out of such a union, not as end, but as accompaniment, comes the undying race of man. The womb is a most fertile soil.

Some have asked if the stock of men could not be improved, — if they could not be bred as cattle. Let Love be purified, and all the rest will follow. A pure love is thus, indeed, the panacea for all the ills of the world.

The only excuse for reproduction is improvement. Nature abhors repetition. Beasts merely propagate their kind; but the offspring of noble men and women will be superior to themselves, as their aspirations are. By their fruits ye shall know them.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, February 27, 1853.

MR. B——: —

I have not answered your letter before because I have been almost constantly in the fields surveying of late. It is long since I have spent so many days so profitably in a pecuniary sense; so unprofitably, it seems to me, in a more important sense. I have earned just a dollar a day for seventy-six days past; for, though I charge at a higher rate for the days which are seen to be spent, yet so many more are spent than appears. This is instead of lecturing, which has not offered, to pay for that book which I printed. I have not only cheap hours, but cheap weeks and months, that is, weeks which are bought at the rate I have named. Not that they are quite lost to me, or make me very melancholy, alas! for I too often take a cheap satisfaction in so spending them, — weeks of pasturing and browsing, like beeves and deer, — which give me animal health, it may be, but create a tough skin over the soul and intellectual part. Yet, if men should offer my body a maintenance for the work of my head alone, I feel that it would be a dangerous temptation.

As to whether what you speak of as the "world's way" (which for the most part is my way), or that which is shown me, is the better, the former is imposture, the latter is truth. I

have the coldest confidence in the last. There is only such hesitation as the appetites feel in following the aspirations. The clod hesitates because it is inert, wants *animation*. The one is the way of death, the other of life everlasting. My hours are not "cheap in such a way that I doubt whether the world's way would not have been better," but cheap in such a way, that I doubt whether the world's way, which I have adopted for the time, could be worse. The whole enterprise of this nation, which is not an upward, but a westward one, toward Oregon, California, Japan, &c., is totally devoid of interest to me, whether performed on foot, or by a Pacific railroad. It is not illustrated by a thought; it is not warmed by a sentiment; there is nothing in it which one should lay down his life for, nor even his gloves, — hardly which one should take up a newspaper for. It is perfectly heathenish, — a fillibustering *toward* heaven by the great western route. No; they may go their way to their manifest destiny, which I trust is not mine. May my seventy-six dollars, whenever I get them, help to carry me in the other direction. I see them on their winding way, but no music is wafted from their host, — only the rattling of change in their pockets. I would rather be a captive knight, and let them all pass by, than be free only to go whither they are bound. What end do they propose to themselves beyond Japan? What aims more lofty have they than the prairie dogs?

As it respects these things, I have not changed an opinion one iota from the first. As the stars looked to me when I was a shepherd in Assyria, they look to me now a New-Englander. The higher the mountain on which you stand, the less change in the prospect from year to year, from age to age. Above a certain height there is no change. I am a Switzer on the edge of the glacier, with his advantages and disadvantages, goitre, or what not. (You may suspect it to be some kind of swelling at any rate.) I have had but one *spiritual* birth (excuse the word), and now whether it rains or snows, whether I laugh or cry, fall further below or approach nearer to my standard; whether Pierce or Scott is elected, — not a new scintillation of light flashes on me, but ever and anon, though with longer intervals, the same surprising and everlastingly new light dawns to me, with only such variations as in the coming of the natural day, with which, indeed, it is often coincident.

As to how to preserve potatoes from rotting, your opinion may change from year to year; but as to how to preserve your soul from rotting, I have nothing to learn, but something to practise.

Thus I declaim against them; but I in my folly am the world I condemn.

I very rarely, indeed, if ever, “feel any itching to be what is called useful to my fellow-men.” Sometimes, — it may be when my thoughts for

want of employment fall into a beaten path or humdrum, — I have dreamed idly of stopping a man's horse that was running away; but, perchance, I wished that he might run, in order that I might stop him; — or of putting out a fire; but then, of course, it must have got well a-going. Now, to tell the truth, I do not dream much of acting upon horses before they run, or of preventing fires which are not yet kindled. What a foul subject is this of doing good, instead of minding one's life, which should be his business; doing good as a dead carcass, which is only fit for manure, instead of as a living man, — instead of taking care to flourish, and smell, and taste sweet, and refresh all mankind to the extent of our capacity and quality. People will sometimes try to persuade you that you have done something from that motive, as if you did not already know enough about it. If I ever *did* a man any good, in their sense, of course it was something exceptional and insignificant compared with the good or evil which I am constantly doing by being what I am. As if you were to preach to ice to shape itself into burning-glasses, which are sometimes useful, and so the peculiar properties of ice be lost. Ice that merely performs the office of a burning-glass does not do its duty.

The problem of life becomes, one cannot say by how many degrees, more complicated as our material wealth is increased, whether that needie

they tell of was a gateway or not, since the problem is not merely nor mainly to get life for our bodies, but by this or a similar discipline to get life for our souls; by cultivating the lowland farm on right principles, that is, with this view, to turn it into an upland farm. You have so many more talents to account for. If I accomplish as much more in spiritual work as I am richer in worldly goods, then I am just as worthy, or worth just as much, as I was before, and no more. I see that, in my own case, money *might* be of great service to me, but probably it would not be, for the difficulty now is, that I do not improve my opportunities, and therefore I am not prepared to have my opportunities increased. Now, I warn you, if it be as you say, you have got to put on the pack of an upland farmer in good earnest the coming spring, the lowland farm being cared for; ay, you must be selecting your seeds forthwith, and doing what winter work you can; and, while others are raising potatoes and Baldwin apples for you, you must be raising apples of the Hesperides for them. (Only hear how he preaches!) No man can suspect that he is the proprietor of an upland farm, — upland in the sense that it will produce nobler crops, and better repay cultivation in the long run, — but he will be perfectly sure that he ought to cultivate it.

Though we are desirous to earn our bread, we need not be anxious to *satisfy* men for it, — though we shall take care to pay them, — but God, who

alone gave it to us. Men may in effect put us in the debtors' jail for that matter, simply for paying our whole debt to God, which includes our debt to them, and though we have his receipt for it, for his paper is dishonored. The cashier will tell you that he has no stock in his bank.

How prompt we are to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our bodies; how slow to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our *souls*. Indeed, we would-be-practical folks cannot use this word without blushing because of our infidelity, having starved this substance almost to a shadow. We feel it to be as absurd as if a man were to break forth into a eulogy on *his dog*, who has n't any. An ordinary man will work every day for a year at shovelling dirt to support his body, or a family of bodies; but he is an extraordinary man who will work a whole day in a year for the support of his soul. Even the priests, the men of God, so called, for the most part confess that they work for the support of the body. But he alone is the truly enterprising and practical man who succeeds in *maintaining* his soul here. Have not we our everlasting life to get? and is not that the only excuse at last for eating, drinking, sleeping, or even carrying an umbrella when it rains? A man might as well devote himself to raising pork, as to fattening the bodies, or temporal part merely, of the whole human family. If we made the true distinction, we should almost all of us be seen to be in the almshouse for souls.

I am much indebted to you because you look so steadily at the better side, or rather the true centre of me (for our true centre may, and perhaps oftenest does, lie entirely aside from us, and we are in fact eccentric), and, as I have elsewhere said, "give me an opportunity to live." You speak as if the image or idea which I see were reflected from me to you, and I see it again reflected from you to me, because we stand at the right angle to one another; and so it goes zigzag to what successive reflecting surfaces, before it is all dissipated or absorbed by the more unreflecting, or differently reflecting, — who knows? Or, perhaps, what you see directly, you refer to me. What a little shelf is required, by which we may impinge upon another, and build there our eyrie in the clouds, and all the heavens we see above us we refer to the crags around and beneath us. Some piece of mica, as it were, in the face or eyes of one, as on the delectable mountains, slanted at the right angle, reflects the heavens to us. But, in the slow geological upheavals and depressions, these mutual angles are disturbed, these suns set, and new ones rise to us. That ideal which I worshipped was a greater stranger to the mica than to me. It was not the hero I admired, but the reflection from his epaulet or helmet. It is nothing (for us) permanently inherent in another, but his attitude or relation to what we prize, that we admire. The meanest man may glitter with micacious particles to his fellow's eye. These are

the spangles that adorn a man. The highest union, — the only *un-ion* (don't laugh), or central oneness, is the coincidence of visual rays. Our club-room was an apartment in a constellation where our visual rays met (and there was no debate about the restaurant). The way between us is over the mount.

Your words make me think of a man of my acquaintance whom I occasionally meet, whom you, too, appear to have met, one *Myself*, as he is called. Yet, why not call him *Yourself*? If you have met with him and know him, it is all I have done; and surely, where there is a mutual acquaintance, the *my* and *thy* make a distinction without a difference.

I do not wonder that you do not like my Canada story. It concerns me but little, and probably is not worth the time it took to tell it. Yet I had absolutely no design whatever in my mind, but simply to report what I saw. I have inserted all of myself that was implicated, or made the excursion. It has come to an end, at any rate; they will print no more, but return me my MS. when it is but little more than half done, as well as another I had sent them, because the editor requires the liberty to omit the heresies without consulting me, — a privilege California is not rich enough to bid for.

I thank you again and again for attending to me; that is to say, I am glad that you hear me and that you also are glad. Hold fast to your

most indefinite, waking dream. The very green dust on the walls is an organized vegetable; the atmosphere has its fauna and flora floating in it; and shall we think that dreams are but dust and ashes, are always disintegrated and crumbling thoughts, and not dust-like thoughts trooping to their standard with music, systems beginning to be organized? These expectations, — these are roots, these are nuts, which even the poorest man has in his bin, and roasts or cracks them occasionally in winter evenings, which even the poor debtor retains with his bed and his pig, i. e. his idleness and sensuality. Men go to the opera because they hear there a faint expression in sound of this news which is never quite distinctly proclaimed. Suppose a man were to sell the hue, the least amount of coloring matter in the superficies of his thought, for a farm, — were to exchange an absolute and infinite value for a relative and finite one, to gain the whole world and lose his own soul!

Do not wait as long as I have before you write. If you will look at another star, I will try to supply my side of the triangle.

Tell Mr. —, that I remember him, and trust that he remembers me.

Yours,

H. D. T.

P. S. — Excuse this rather flippant preaching, which does not cost me enough; and do not think that I mean you *always*, though your letter *requested* the subjects.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, April 10, 1853.

MR. B—— : —

Another singular kind of spiritual foot-ball, — really nameless, handleless, homeless, like myself, — a mere arena for thoughts and feelings; definite enough outwardly, indefinite more than enough inwardly. But I do not know why we should be styled misters or masters: we come so near to being anything or nothing, and seeing that we are mastered, and not wholly sorry to be mastered, by the least phenomenon. It seems to me that we are the mere creatures of thought, — one of the lowest forms of intellectual life, — we men, as the sunfish is of animal life. As yet our thoughts have acquired no definiteness nor solidity; they are purely molluscous, not vertebrate; and the height of our existence is to float upward in an ocean where the sun shines, appearing only like a vast soup or chowder to the eyes of the immortal navigators. It is wonderful that I can be here, and you there, and that we can correspond, and do many other things, when, in fact, there is so little of us, either or both, anywhere. In a few minutes, I expect, this slight film or dash of vapor that I am will be what is called asleep, — resting! forsooth from what? Hard work! and thought!. The hard work of the dandelion down, which floats over the meadow all day; the hard work of

a pismire, that labors to raise a hillock all day, and even by moonlight. Suddenly I can come forward into the utmost apparent distinctness, and speak with a sort of emphasis to you; and the next moment I am so faint an entity, and make so slight an impression, that nobody can find the traces of me. I try to hunt myself up, and find that the little of me that is discoverable is falling asleep, and then I assist and tuck it up. It is getting late. How can *I* starve or feed? Can *I* be said to sleep? There is not enough of me even for that. If you hear a noise, — 't aint I, — 't aint I, — as the dog says with a tin-kettle tied to his tail. I read of something happening to another the other day: how happens it that nothing ever happens to me? A dandelion down that never alights, — settles, — blown off by a boy to see if his mother wanted him, — some divine boy in the upper pastures.

Well, if there really is another such a meteor sojourning in these spaces, I would like to ask you if you know whose estate this is that we are on? For my part, I enjoy it well enough, what with the wild apples and the scenery; but I should n't wonder if the owner set his dog on me next. I could remember something not much to the purpose, probably; but if I stick to what I do know, then —

It is worth the while to live respectably unto ourselves. We can possibly *get along* with a

neighbor, even with a bedfellow, whom we respect but very little; but as soon as it comes to that, that we do not respect ourselves, then we do not get along at all, no matter how much money we are paid for halting. There are old heads in the world who cannot help me by their example or advice to live worthily and satisfactorily to myself; but I believe that it is in my power to elevate myself this very hour above the common level of my life. It is better to have your head in the clouds, and know where you are, if indeed you cannot get it above them, than to breathe the clearer atmosphere below them, and think that you are in paradise.

Once you were in Milton doubting what to do. To live a better life,—this surely can be done. Dot and carry one. Wait not for a clear sight, for that you are to get. What you see clearly you may omit to do. Milton and Worcester! It is all B——, B——. Never mind the rats in the wall; the cat will take care of them. All that men have said or are is a very faint rumor, and it is not worth the while to remember or refer to that. If you are to meet God, will you refer to anybody out of that court? How shall men know how I succeed, unless they are in at the life? I did not see the “Times” reporter there.

Is it not delightful to provide one’s self with the necessaries of life,—to collect dry wood for the fire when the weather grows cool, or fruits

when we grow hungry? — not till then. And then we have all the time left for thought!

Of what use were it, pray, to get a little wood to burn to warm your body this cold weather, if there were not a divine fire kindled at the same time to warm your spirit?

“Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!”

I cuddle up by my stove, and there I get up another fire which warms fire itself. Life is so short that it is not wise to take roundabout ways, nor can we spend much time in waiting. Is it absolutely necessary, then, that we should do as we are doing? Are we chiefly under obligations to the devil, like Tom Walker? Though it is late to leave off this wrong way, it will seem early the moment we begin in the right way; instead of mid-afternoon, it will be early morning with us. We have not got half-way to dawn yet.

As for the lectures, I feel that I have something to say, especially on Travelling, Vagueness, and Poverty; but I cannot come now. I will wait till I am fuller, and have fewer engagements. Your suggestions will help me much to write them when I am ready. I am going to Haverhill to-morrow surveying, for a week or more. You met me on my last errand thither.

I trust that you realize what an exaggerator I am, — that I lay myself out to exaggerate when-

ever I have an opportunity, — pile Pelion upon Ossa, to reach heaven so. Expect no trivial truth from me, unless I am on the witness-stand. I will come as near to lying as you can drive a coach-and-four. If it is n't thus and so with me, it is with something. I am not particular whether I get the shells or meat, in view of the latter's worth.

I see that I have not at all answered your letter, but there is time enough for that.

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, December 19, 1852.

MR. B—— : —

My debt has accumulated so that I should have answered your last letter at once, if I had not been the subject of what is called a press of engagements, having a lecture to write for last Wednesday, and surveying more than usual besides. It has been a kind of running fight with me, — the enemy not always behind me, I trust.

True, a man cannot lift himself by his own waistbands, because he cannot get out of himself; but he can expand himself (which is better, there being no up nor down in nature), and so split his waistbands, being already within himself.

You speak of doing and being, and the vanity, real or apparent, of much doing. The suckers — I think it is they — make nests in our river in the spring of more than a cart-load of small stones, amid which to deposit their ova. The other day I opened a muskrat's house. It was made of weeds, five feet broad at base, and three feet high, and far and low within it was a little cavity, only a foot in diameter, where the rat dwelt. It may seem trivial, this piling up of weeds, but so the race of muskrats is preserved. We must heap up a great pile of doing, for a small diameter of being. Is it not imperative on us that we *do* something, if we only work in a tread-mill? And, indeed, some sort of revolving is necessary to produce a centre and nucleus of being. What exercise is to the body, employment is to the mind and morals. Consider what an amount of drudgery must be performed, — how much humdrum and prosaic labor goes to any work of the least value. There are so many layers of mere white lime in every shell to that thin inner one so beautifully tinted. Let not the shell-fish think to build his house of that alone; and pray, what are its tints to him? Is it not his smooth, close-fitting shirt merely, whose tints *are not* to him, being in the dark, but only when he is gone or dead, and his shell is heaved up to light, a wreck upon the beach, do they appear. With him, too, it is a song of the shirt, "Work, — work, — work!" And the work

is not merely a police in the gross sense, but in the higher sense, a discipline. If it is surely the means to the highest end we know, can any work be humble or disgusting? Will it not rather be elevating as a ladder, the means by which we are translated?

How admirably the artist is made to accomplish his self-culture by devotion to his art! The wood-sawyer, through his effort to do his work well, becomes not merely a better wood-sawyer, but measurably a better *man*. Few are the men that can work on their navels, — only some Brahmins that I have heard of. To the painter is given some paint and canvas instead; to the Irishman a hog, typical of himself. In a thousand apparently humble ways men busy themselves to make some right take the place of some wrong, — if it is only to make a better paste-blackening, — and they are themselves *so much* the better morally for it.

You say that you do not succeed much. Does it concern you enough that you do not? Do you work hard enough at it? Do you get the benefit of discipline out of it? If so, persevere. Is it a more serious thing than to walk a thousand miles in a thousand successive hours? Do you get any corns by it? Do you ever think of hanging yourself on account of failure?

If you are going into that line, — going to besiege the city of God, — you must not only be strong in engines, but prepared with provisions to

starve out the garrison. An Irishman came to see me to-day, who is endeavoring to get his family out to this New World. He rises at half past four, milks twenty-eight cows (which has swollen the joints of his fingers), and eats his breakfast, without any milk in his tea or coffee, before six; and so on, day after day, for six and a half dollars a month; and thus he keeps his virtue in him, if he does not add to it; and he regards me as a gentleman able to assist him; but if I ever get to be a gentleman, it will be by working after my fashion harder than he does. If my joints are not swollen, it must be because I deal with the teats of celestial cows before breakfast (and the milker in this case is always allowed some of the milk for his breakfast), to say nothing of the flocks and herds of Admetus afterward.

It is the art of mankind to polish the world, and every one who works is scrubbing in some part.

If the work is high and far, you must not only aim aright, but draw the bow with all your might. You must qualify yourself to use a bow which no humbler archer can bend.

“Work, — work, — work!”

Who shall know it for a bow? It is not of yew-tree. It is straighter than a ray of light; flexibility is not known for one of its qualities.

December 22.

So far I had got when I was called off to survey. Pray read the life of Haydon the painter, if you have not. It is a small revelation for these latter days; a great satisfaction to know that he has lived, though he is now dead. Have you met with the letter of a Turkish *cadi* at the end of Layard's "Ancient Babylon"? that also is refreshing, and a capital comment on the whole book which precedes it, — the Oriental genius speaking through him.

Those Brahmins put it through. They come off, or rather stand still, conquerors, with some withered arms or legs at least to show; and they are said to have cultivated the faculty of abstraction to a degree unknown to Europeans. If we cannot sing of faith and triumph, we will sing our despair. We will be that kind of bird. There are day owls, and there are night owls, and each is beautiful and even musical while about its business.

Might you not find some positive work to do with your back to Church and State, letting your back do all the rejection of them? Can you not *go* upon your pilgrimage, Peter, along the winding mountain path whither you face? A step more will make those funereal church bells over your shoulder sound far and sweet as a natural sound.

"Work, — work, — work!"

Why not make a *very large* mud-pie and bake it in the sun! Only put no Church nor State into it, nor upset any other pepper-box that way. Dig out a woodchuck, for that has nothing to do with rotting institutions. Go ahead.

Whether a man spends his day in an ecstasy or despondency, he must do some work to show for it, even as there are flesh and bones to show for him. We are superior to the joy we experience.

Your last two letters, methinks, have more nerve and will in them than usual, as if you had erected yourself more. Why are not they good work, if you only had a hundred correspondents to tax you?

Make your failure tragical by the earnestness and steadfastness of your endeavor, and then it will not differ from success. Prove it to be the inevitable fate of mortals, — of one mortal, — if you can.

You said that you were writing on immortality. I wish you would communicate to me what you know about that. You are sure to live while that is your theme.

Thus I write on some text which a sentence of your letters may have furnished.

I think of coming to see you as soon as I get a new coat, if I have money enough left. I will write to you again about it.

HENRY D THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, January 21, 1854.

MR. B—— : —

My coat is at last done, and my mother and sister allow that I am *so far* in a condition to go abroad. I feel as if I had gone abroad the moment I put it on. It is, as usual, a production strange to me, the wearer, invented by some Count D'Orsay, and the maker of it was not acquainted with any of my real depressions or elevations. He only measured a peg to hang it on, and might have made the loop big enough to go over my head. It requires a not quite innocent indifference, not to say insolence, to wear it. Ah! the process by which we get our coats is not what it should be. Though the Church declares it righteous, and its priest pardons me, my own good genius tells me that it is hasty, and coarse, and false. I expect a time when, or rather an integrity by which a man will get his coat as honestly and as perfectly fitting as a tree its bark. Now our garments are typical of our conformity to the ways of the world, i. e. of the devil, and to some extent react on us and poison us, like that shirt which Hercules put on.

I think to come and see you next week, on Monday, if nothing hinders. I have just returned from court at Cambridge, whither I was called as a witness, having surveyed a water-privilege, about which there is a dispute, since you were here.

Ah! what foreign countries there are, greater in extent than the United States or Russia, and with no more souls to a square mile, stretching away on every side from every human being, with whom you have no sympathy. Their humanity affects me as simply monstrous. Rocks, earth, brute beasts, comparatively, are not so strange to me. When I sit in the parlors and kitchens of some with whom my business brings me — I was going to say in contact — (business, like misery, makes strange bedfellows), I feel a sort of awe, and as forlorn as if I were cast away on a desolate shore. I think of Riley's narrative and his sufferings. You, who soared like a merlin with your mate through the realms of ether, in the presence of the unlike, drop at once to earth, a mere amorphous squab, divested of your air-inflated pinions. (By the way, excuse this writing, for I am using the stub of the last feather I chance to possess.) You travel on, however, through this dark and desert world; you see in the distance an intelligent and sympathizing lineament; stars come forth in the dark, and oases appear in the desert.

But (to return to the subject of coats), we are wellnigh smothered under yet more fatal coats, which do not fit us, our whole lives long. Consider the cloak that our employment or station is; how rarely men treat each other for what in their true and naked characters they are; how we use and tolerate pretension, how the judge is clothed with

dignity which does not belong to him, and the trembling witness with humility that does not belong to him, and the criminal, perchance, with shame or impudence which no more belong to him. It does not matter so much, then, what is the fashion of the cloak with which we cloak these cloaks. Change the coat; put the judge in the criminal-box, and the criminal on the bench, and you might think that you had changed the men.

No doubt the thinnest of all cloaks is conscious deception or lies; it is sleazy and frays out; it is not close-woven like cloth; but its meshes are a coarse net-work. A man can afford to lie only at the intersection of the threads; but truth puts in the filling, and makes a consistent stuff.

I mean merely to suggest how much the station affects the demeanor and self-respectability of the parties, and that the difference between the judge's coat of cloth and the criminal's is insignificant, compared with, or only partially significant of, the difference between the coats which their respective stations permit them to wear. What airs the judge may put on over his coat which the criminal may not! The judge's opinion (*sententia*) of the criminal *sentences* him, and is read by the clerk of the court, and published to the world, and executed by the sheriff; but the criminal's opinion of the judge has the weight of a sentence, and is published and executed only in the supreme court of the universe, — a court not of common

pleas. How much juster is the one than the other? Men are continually *sentencing* each other; but, whether we be judges or criminals, the sentence is ineffectual unless we continue ourselves.

I am glad to hear that I do not always limit your vision when you work this way; that you sometimes see the light through me; that I am here and there windows, and not all dead wall. Might not the community sometimes petition a man to remove himself as a nuisance, a darkener of the day, a too large mote?

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, August 8, 1854.

MR. B——:—

Methinks I have spent a rather unprofitable summer thus far. I have been too much with the world, as the poet might say. The completest performance of the highest duties it imposes would yield me but little satisfaction. Better the neglect of all such, because your life passed on a level where it was impossible to recognize them. Latterly, I have heard the very flies buzz too distinctly, and have accused myself because I did not still this superficial din. We must not be too easily distracted by the crying of children or of dynasties. The Irishman erects his sty, and gets

drunk, and jabbers more and more under my eaves, and I am responsible for all that filth and folly. I find it, as ever, very unprofitable to have much to do with men. It is sowing the wind, but not reaping even the whirlwind; only reaping an unprofitable calm and stagnation. Our conversation is a smooth, and civil, and never-ending speculation merely. I take up the thread of it again in the morning, with very much such courage as the invalid takes his prescribed Seidlitz powders. Shall I help you to some of the mackerel? It would be more respectable if men, as has been said before, instead of being such pigny desperates, were Giant Despairs. Emerson says that his life is so unprofitable and shabby for the most part, that he is driven to all sorts of resources, and, among the rest, to men. I tell him that we differ only in our resources. Mine is to get away from men. They very rarely affect me as grand or beautiful; but I know that there is a sunrise and a sunset every day. In the summer, this world is a mere watering-place, — a Saratoga, — drinking so many tumblers of Congress water; and in the winter, is it any better, with its oratorios? I have seen more men than usual, lately; and, well as I was acquainted with one, I am surprised to find what vulgar fellows they are. They do a little business commonly each day, in order to pay their board, and then they congregate in sitting-rooms and feebly fabulate and paddle in the social slush

and when I think that they have sufficiently relaxed, and am prepared to see them steal away to their shrines, they go unashamed to their beds, and take on a new layer of sloth. They may be single, or have families in their *faineancy*. I do not meet men who can have nothing to do with me because they have so much to do with themselves. However, I trust that a very few cherish purposes which they never declare. Only think, for a moment, of a man about his affairs! How we should respect him! How glorious he would appear! Not working for any corporation, its agent, or president, but fulfilling the end of his being! A man about *his business* would be the cynosure of all eyes.

The other evening I was determined that I would silence this shallow din; that I would walk in various directions and see if there was not to be found any depth of silence around. As Bonaparte sent out his horsemen in the Red Sea on all sides to find shallow water, so I sent forth my mounted thoughts to find deep water. I left the village and paddled up the river to Fair Haven Pond. As the sun went down, I saw a solitary boatman disporting on the smooth lake. The falling dews seemed to strain and purify the air, and I was soothed with an infinite stillness. I got the world, as it were, by the nape of the neck, and held it under in the tide of its own events, till it was drowned, and then I let it go down stream

like a dead dog. Vast hollow chambers of silence stretched away on every side, and my being expanded in proportion, and filled them. Then first could I appreciate sound, and find it musical.

But now for your news. Tell us of the year. Have you fought the good fight? What is the state of your crops? Will your harvest answer well to the seed-time, and are you cheered by the prospect of stretching cornfields? Is there any blight on your fields, any murrain in your herds? Have you tried the size and quality of your potatoes? It does one good to see their balls dangling in the lowlands. Have you got your meadow hay before the fall rains shall have set in? Is there enough in your barns to keep your cattle over? Are you killing weeds now-a-days? or have you earned leisure to go a-fishing? Did you plant any Giant Regrets last spring, such as I saw advertised? It is not a new species, but the result of cultivation and a fertile soil. They are excellent for sauce. How is it with your marrow squashes for winter use? Is there likely to be a sufficiency of fall feed in your neighborhood? What is the state of the springs? I read that in your county there is more water on the hills than in the valleys. Do you find it easy to get all the help you require? Work early and late, and let your men and teams rest at noon. Be careful not to drink too much sweetened water, while at your hoeing, this hot weather. You can bear the heat much better for it.

H. D. T.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, October 1, 1854.

DEAR SIR: —

I had duly received your very kind and frank letter, but delayed to answer it thus long, because I have little skill as a correspondent, and wished to send you something more than my thanks. I was gratified by your prompt and hearty acceptance of my book. Your's is the only word of greeting I am likely to receive from a dweller in the woods like myself, from where the whip-poor-will and cuckoo are heard, and there are better than moral clouds drifting over, and real breezes blowing.

Your account excites in me a desire to see the Middleboro' Ponds, of which I had already heard somewhat; as also some very beautiful ponds on the Cape, in Harwich, I think, near which I once passed. I have sometimes also thought of visiting that remnant of *our* Indians still living near you. But then, you know, there is nothing like one's native fields and lakes. The best news you send me is, not that Nature with you is so fair and genial, but that there is one there who likes her so well. That proves all that was asserted.

Homer, of course, you include in your list of lovers of Nature; and, by the way, let me mention here, — for this is my thunder “lately,” —

William Gilpin's long series of books on the Picturesque, with their illustrations. If it chances that you have not met with these, I cannot just now frame a better wish than that you may one day derive as much pleasure from the inspection of them as I have.

Much as you have told me of yourself, you have still, I think, a little the advantage of me in this correspondence, for I have told you still more in my book. You have therefore the broadest mark to fire at.

A young Englishman, Mr. Cholmondeley, is just now waiting for me to take a walk with him; therefore excuse this very barren note from

Yours, hastily at last,

HENRY D. THOREAU

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, December 19, 1854.

MR. B——:—

I suppose you have heard of my truly providential meeting with Mr. ——, — providential because it saved me from the suspicion that my words had fallen altogether on stony ground, when it turned out that there was some Worcester soil there. You will allow me to consider that I correspond with him through you.

I confess that I am a very bad correspondent, so far as promptness of reply is concerned; but then I am sure to answer sooner or later. The longer I have forgotten you, the more I remember you. For the most part I have not been idle since I saw you. How does the world go with you? or rather, how do you get along without it? I have not yet learned to live, that I can see, and I fear that I shall not very soon. I find, however, that in the long run things correspond to my original idea, — that they correspond to nothing else so much; and thus a man may really be a true prophet without any great exertion. The day is never so dark, nor the night even, but that the laws at least of light still prevail, and so may make it light in our minds if they are open to the truth. There is considerable danger that a man will be crazy between dinner and supper; but it will not directly answer any good purpose that I know of, and it is just as easy to be sane. We have got to know what both life and death are, before we can begin to live after our own fashion. Let us be learning our a-b-c's as soon as possible. I never yet knew the sun to be knocked down and rolled through a mud-puddle; he comes out honor-bright from behind every storm. Let us then take sides with the sun, seeing we have so much leisure. Let us not put all we prize into a football to be kicked, when a bladder will do as well.

When an Indian is burned, his body may be

broiled, it may be no more than a beef-steak. What of that? They may broil his *heart*, but they do not therefore broil his *courage*, — his principles. Be of good courage! That is the main thing.

If a man were to place himself in an attitude to bear manfully the greatest evil that can be inflicted on him, he would find suddenly that there was no such evil to bear; his brave back would go a-begging. When Atlas got his back made up, that was all that was required. (In this case *a priv.*, not *pleon.*, and *τλήμι.*) The world rests on principles. The wise gods will never make underpinning of a man. But as long as he crouches, and skulks, and shirks his work, every creature that has weight will be treading on his toes, and crushing him; he will himself tread with one foot on the other foot.

The monster is never just there where we think he is. What is truly monstrous is our cowardice and sloth.

Have no idle disciplines like the Catholic Church and others; have only positive and fruitful ones. Do what you know you ought to do. Why should we ever go abroad, even across the way, to ask a neighbor's advice? There is a nearer neighbor within is incessantly telling us how we should behave. But we wait for the neighbor without to tell us of some false, easier way.

They have a census-table in which they put

down the number of the insane. Do you believe that they put them all down there? Why, in every one of these houses there is at least one man fighting or squabbling a good part of his time with a dozen pet demons of his own breeding and cherishing, which are relentlessly gnawing at his vitals; and if perchance he resolve at length that he will courageously combat them, he says, "Ay! ay! I will attend to you after dinner!" And, when that time comes, he concludes that he is good for another stage, and reads a column or two about the *Eastern War!* Pray, to be in earnest, where is Sevastopol? Who is Menchikoff? and Nicholas behind these? who the Allies? Did not we fight a little (little enough to be sure, but just enough to make it interesting) at Alma, at Balaclava, at Inkermann? We love to fight far from home. Ah! the Minie musket is the king of weapons. Well, let us get one then.

I just put another stick into my stove, — a pretty large mass of white oak. How many men will do enough this cold winter to pay for the fuel that will be required to warm them? I suppose I have burned up a pretty good-sized tree to-night, — and for what? I settled with Mr. Tarbell for it the other day; but that was n't the final settlement. I got off cheaply from him. At last, one will say, "Let us see, how much wood did you burn, sir?" And I shall shudder to think that the next question will be, "What did you do while you were

warm?" Do we think the ashes will pay for it? that God is an ash-man? It is a fact that we have got to render an account for the deeds done in the body.

Who knows but we shall be better the next year than we have been the past? At any rate, I wish you a really *new* year, — commencing from the instant you read this, — and happy or unhappy, according to your deserts.

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, September 26, 1855.

MR. B——: —

The other day I thought that my health must be better, — that I gave at last a sign of vitality, — because I experienced a slight chagrin. But I do not see how strength is to be got into my legs again. These months of feebleness have yielded few, if any, thoughts, though they have not passed without serenity, such as our sluggish Musketaquid suggests. I hope that the harvest is to come. I trust that you have at least warped up the stream a little daily, holding fast by your anchors at night, since I saw you, and have kept my place for me while I have been absent.

Mr. R——, of New Bedford, has just made me

a visit of a day and a half, and I have had a quite good time with him. He and C—— have got on particularly well together. He is a man of very simple tastes, notwithstanding his wealth; a lover of nature; but, above all, singularly frank and plain-spoken. I think that you might enjoy meeting him. Sincerity is a great but rare virtue, and we pardon to it much complaining, and the betrayal of many weaknesses. R—— says of himself, that he sometimes thinks that he has all the infirmities of genius, without the genius; is wretched without a hair-pillow, &c.; expresses a great and awful uncertainty with regard to “God,” “Death,” his “immortality”; says, “If I only knew,” &c. He loves Cowper’s Task better than anything else; and thereafter, perhaps, Thomson, Gray, and even Howitt. He has evidently suffered for want of sympathizing companions. He says that he sympathizes with much in my books, but much in them is naught to him, — “namby-pamby,” — “stuff,” — “mystical.” Why will not I, having common sense, write in plain English always; *teach* men in detail how to live a simpler life, &c.; not go off into ——? But I say that I have no scheme about it, — no designs on men at all; and, if I had, my mode would be to tempt them with the fruit, and not with the manure. To what end do I lead a simple life at all, pray? That I may teach others to simplify their lives? — and so all our lives be *simplified* merely, like an algebraic for-

mula? Or not, rather, that I may make use of the ground I have cleared, to live more worthily and profitably? I would fain lay the most stress forever on that which is the most important, — imports the most to me, — though it were only (what it is likely to be) a vibration in the air. As a preacher, I should be prompted to tell men, not so much how to get their wheat-bread cheaper, as of the bread of life compared with which *that* is bran. Let a man only taste these loaves, and he becomes a skilful economist at once. He'll not waste much time in earning those. Don't spend your time in drilling soldiers, who may turn out hirelings after all, but give to undrilled peasantry a *country* to fight for. The schools begin with what they call the elements, and where do they end?

I was glad to hear the other day that H—— and —— were gone to Katahdin; it must be so much better to go to than a Woman's Rights or Abolition Convention; better still, to the delectable primitive mounts within you, which you have dreamed of from your youth up, and seen, perhaps, in the horizon, but never climbed.

But how do *you* do? Is the air sweet to you? Do you find anything at which you can work, accomplishing something solid from day to day? Have you put sloth and doubt behind considerably? — had one redeeming dream this summer? I dreamed, last night, that I could vault over any

height it pleased me. That was *something*; and I contemplated myself with a slight satisfaction in the morning for it.

Methinks I will write to you. Methinks you will be glad to hear. We will stand on solid foundations to one another, - I a column planted on this shore, you on that. We meet the same sun in his rising. We were built slowly, and have come to our bearing. We will not mutually fall over that we may meet, but will grandly and eternally guard the straits. Methinks I see an inscription on you, which the architect made, the stucco being worn off to it. The name of that ambitious worldly king is crumbling away. I see it toward sunset in favorable lights. Each must read for the other, as might a sailer by. Be sure you are star-y-pointing still. How is it on your side?

I will not require an answer until you think I have paid my debts to you.

I have just got a letter from R——, urging me to come to New Bedford, which possibly I may do. He says I can wear my old clothes there.

Let me be remembered in your quiet house.

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, September 27, 1855.

FRIEND R——:—

I am sorry that you were obliged to leave Concord without seeing more of it, — its river and woods, and various pleasant walks, and its worthies. I assure you that I am none the worse for my walk with you, but on all accounts the better. Methinks I am regaining my health; but I would like to know first what it was that ailed me.

I have not yet conveyed your message to Mr. H——, but will not fail to do so. That idea of occupying the old house is a good one, — quite feasible, — and you could bring your hair-pillow with you. It is an *inn* in Concord which I had not thought of, — a philosopher's inn. That large chamber might make a man's idea expand proportionably. It would be well to have an interest in some old chamber in a deserted house in every part of the country which attracted us. There would be no such place to receive one's guests as that. If old furniture is fashionable, why not go the whole house at once? I shall endeavor to make Mr. H—— believe that the old house is the chief attraction of his farm, and that it is his duty to preserve it by all honest appliances. You might take a lease of it *in perpetuo*, and done with it.

I am so wedded to my way of spending a day,

— require such broad margins of leisure, and such a complete wardrobe of old clothes, that I am ill-fitted for going abroad. Pleasant is it sometimes to sit at home, on a single egg all day, in your own nest, though it may prove at last to be an egg of chalk. The old coat that I wear is Concord; it is my morning-robe and study-gown, my working dress and suit of ceremony, and my night-gown after all. Cleave to the simplest ever. Home, — home, — home. *Cars* sound like *cares* to me.

I am accustomed to think very long of going anywhere, — am slow to move. I hope to hear a response of the oracle first.

However, I think that I will try the effect of your talisman on the iron horse next Saturday, and dismount at Tarkiln Hill. Perhaps your sea air will be good for me.

I conveyed your invitation to C——, but he apparently will not come.

Excuse my not writing earlier; but I had not decided.

Yours,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, October 12, 1855.

MR. R——:—

I fear that you had a lonely and disagreeable ride back to New Bedford, through the Carver woods and so on, —perhaps in the rain too, and I am in part answerable for it. I feel very much in debt to you and your family for the pleasant days I spent at Brooklawn. Tell A—— and W—— that the shells which they gave me are spread out, and make quite a show to inland eyes. Methinks I still hear the strains of the piano, the violin, and the flageolet blended together. Excuse *me* for the noise which I believe drove you to take refuge in the shanty. That shanty is indeed a favorable place to expand in, which I fear I did not enough improve.

On my way through Boston, I inquired for Gilpin's works at Little, Brown, & Co.'s, Monroe's, Ticknor's, and Burnham's. They have not got them. They told me at Little, Brown, and Co.'s that his works (not complete), in twelve vols., 8vo, were imported and sold in this country five or six years ago for about fifteen dollars. Their terms for importing are ten per cent on the cost. I copied from the "London Catalogue of Books, 1816-51," at their shop, the following list of Gilpin's Works:—

In a Description of Middleborough in the Hist Coll., Vol. III., 1810, signed Nehemiah Bennet, Middleborough, 1793, it is said: "There is on the easterly shore of Assawampsitt Pond, on the shore of Betty's Neck, two rocks which have curious marks thereon (supposed to be done by the Indians), which appear like the steppings of a person with naked feet which settled into the rocks; likewise the prints of a hand on several places, with a number of other marks; also there is a rock on a high hill a little to the eastward of the old stone fishing wear, where there is the print of a person's hand in said rock."

It would be well to look at those rocks again more carefully; also at the rock on the hill.

I should think that you would like to explore Sinpatuct Pond in Rochester, — it is so large and near. It is an interesting fact that the alewives used to ascend to it, — if they do not still, — both from Mattapoissett and through Great Quitticus.

There will be no trouble about the chamber in the old house, though, as I told you, Mr. Hosmer *may* expect some compensation for it. He says, "Give my respects to Mr. R——, and tell him that I cannot be at a large expense to preserve an antiquity or curiosity. Nature must do its work." "But," say I, "he asks you only not to assist Nature."

Yours,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, October 16, 1855.

FRIEND RICKETSON:—

I have got both your letters at once. You must not think Concord so barren a place when C—— is away. There are the river and fields left yet; and I, though ordinarily a man of business, should have some afternoons and evenings to spend with you, I trust, — that is, if you could stand so much of me. If you can spend your time profitably here, or without ennui, having an occasional ramble or *tête-à-tête* with one of the natives, it will give me pleasure to have you in the neighborhood. You see I am preparing you for our awful un-social ways, — keeping in our dens a good part of the day, — sucking our claws perhaps. But then we make a religion of it, and that you cannot but respect.

If you know the taste of your own heart, and like it, come to Concord, and I'll warrant you enough here to season the dish with, — ay, even though C—— and E—— and I were all away. We might paddle quietly up the river. Then there are one or two more ponds to be seen, &c.

I should very much enjoy further rambling with you in your vicinity, but must postpone it for the present. To tell the truth, I am planning to get seriously to work after these long months of inefficiency and idleness. I do not know whether you

are haunted by any such demon which puts you on the alert to pluck the fruit of each day as it passes, and store it safely in your bin. True, it is well to live abandonedly from time to time; but, to our working hours that must be as the spile to the bung. So for a long season I must enjoy only a low slanting gleam in my mind's eye from the Middleborough Ponds far away.

Methinks I am getting a little more strength into those knees of mine; and, for my part, I believe that God *does* delight in the strength of a man's legs.

Yours,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, December 9, 1855.

MR. B——: —

Thank you! thank you for going a-wooding with me, — and enjoying it, — for being warmed by my wood fire. I have indeed enjoyed it much alone. I see how I might enjoy it yet more with company, — how we might help each other to live. And to be admitted to Nature's hearth costs nothing. None is excluded; but excludes himself. You have only to push aside the curtain.

I am glad to hear that you were there too

There are many more such voyages, and longer ones, to be made on that river, for it is the water of life. The Ganges is nothing to it. Observe its reflections, — no idea but is familiar to it. That river, though to dull eyes it seems terrestrial wholly, flows through Elysium. What powers bathe in it invisible to villagers! Talk of its shallowness, — that hay-carts can be driven through it at midsummer: its depth passeth my understanding. If, forgetting the allurements of the world, I could drink deeply enough of it; if cast adrift from the shore, I could with complete integrity float on it, I should never be seen on the mill-dam again. If there is any depth in me, there is a corresponding depth in it. It is the cold blood of the gods. I paddle and bathe in their artery.

I do not want a stick of wood for so trivial a use as to burn even; but they get it over night, and carve and gild it that it may please my eye. What persevering lovers they are! What infinite pains to attract and delight us! They will supply us with fagots wrapped in the daintiest packages, and freight paid; sweet-scented woods, and bursting into flower, and resounding as if Orpheus had just left them, — these shall be our fuel, and we still prefer to chaffer with the wood-merchant.

The jug we found still stands draining bottom up on the bank, on the sunny side of the house. That river, — who shall say exactly whence it

came, and whither it goes? Does aught that flows come from a higher source? Many things drift downward on its surface which would enrich a man. If you could only be on the alert all day, and every day. And the nights are as long as the days.

Do you not think you could contrive thus to get woody fibre enough to bake your wheaten bread with? Would you not perchance have tasted the sweet crust of another kind of bread in the mean while, which ever hangs ready baked on the bread-fruit trees of the world?

Talk of burning your smoke after the wood has been consumed! There is a far more important and warming heat, commonly lost, which precedes the burning of the wood. It is the smoke of industry, which is incense. I had been so thoroughly warmed in body and spirit, that when at length my fuel was housed, I came near selling it to the ash-man, as if I had extracted all its heat.

You should have been here to help me get in my boat. The last time I used it, November 27th, paddling up the Assabet, I saw a great round pine log sunk deep in the water, and with labor got it aboard. When I was floating this home so gently, it occurred to me why I had found it. It was to make wheels with to roll my boat into winter quarters upon. So I sawed off two thick rollers from one end, pierced them for wheels, and then of a joist which I had found drifting on the river

in the summer, I made an axletree, and on this I rolled my boat out.

Miss Mary Emerson is here, — the youngest person in Concord, though about eighty, — and the most apprehensive of a genuine thought; earnest to know of your inner life; most stimulating society; and exceedingly witty withal. She says they called her old when she was young, and she has never grown any older. I wish you could see her.

My books did not arrive till November 30th, the cargo of the Asia having been complete when they reached Liverpool. I have arranged them in a case which I made in the mean while, partly of river boards. I have not dipped far into the new ones yet. One is splendidly bound and illuminated. They are in English, French, Latin, Greek, and Sanscrit. I have not made out the significance of this Godsend yet.

Farewell, and bright dreams to you!

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, December 25, 1855.

FRIEND R——:—

Though you have not shown your face here, I trust that you did not interpret my last note to my disadvantage. I remember that, among other things, I wished to break it to you, that, owing to engagements, I should not be able to show you so much attention as I could wish, or as you had shown to me. How we did scour over the country! I hope your horse will live as long as one which I hear just died in the south of France at the age of forty. Yet I had no doubt you would get quite enough of me. Do not give it up so easily. The old house is still empty, and Hosmer is easy to treat with.

C—— was here about ten days ago. I told him of my visit to you, and that he too must go and see you and your country. This may have suggested his writing to you.

That island lodge, especially for some weeks in a summer, and new explorations in your vicinity, are certainly very alluring; but *such are my engagements to myself*, that I dare not promise to wend your way, but will for the present only heartily thank you for your kind and generous offer. When my vacation comes, then look out.

My legs have grown considerably stronger, and that is all that ails me.

But I wish now above all to inform you, — though I suppose you will not be particularly interested, — that Cholmondeley has gone to the Crimea, “a complete soldier,” with a design, when he returns, if he ever returns, to buy a cottage in the South of England, and tempt me over; but that, before going, he busied himself in buying, and has caused to be forwarded to me by Chapman, a royal gift, in the shape of twenty-one distinct works (one in nine volumes, — forty-four volumes in all), almost exclusively relating to ancient Hindoo literature, and scarcely one of them to be bought in America. I am familiar with many of them, and know how to prize them.

I send you information of this as I might of the birth of a child.

Please remember me to all your family.

Yours truly,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, March 5, 1856.

DEAR SIR: —

I have been out of town, else I should have acknowledged your letter before. Though not in the best mood for writing, I will say what I can now. You plainly have a rare, though a cheap,

resource in your shanty. Perhaps the time will come when every country-seat will have one, — when every country-seat will *be one*. I would advise you to see that shanty business out, though you go shanty-mad. Work your vein till it is exhausted, or conducts you to a broader one; so that C—— shall stand before your shanty, and say, “That is your house.”

This has indeed been a grand winter for me, and for all of us. I am not considering how much I have enjoyed it. What matters it how happy or unhappy we have been, if we have minded our business and advanced our affairs. I have made it a part of my business to wade in the snow, and take the measure of the ice. The ice on our pond was just two feet thick on the first of March; and I have to-day been surveying a wood-lot, where I sank about two feet at every step.

It is high time that you, fanned by the warm breezes of the Gulf stream, had begun to “*lay*,” for even the Concord hens have, though one wonders where they find the raw material of egg-shell here. Beware how you put off your laying to any later spring, else your cackling will not have the inspiring early spring sound.

As for visiting you in April, though I am inclined enough to take some more rambles in your neighborhood, especially by the seaside, I dare not engage myself, nor allow you to expect me. The truth is, I have my enterprises now as ever, at

which I tug with ridiculous feebleness, but admirable perseverance, and cannot say when I shall be sufficiently fancy-free for such an excursion.

You have done well to write a lecture on Cowper. In the expectation of getting you to read it here, I applied to the curators of our Lyceum; but, alas! our Lyceum has been a failure this winter for want of funds. It ceased some weeks since, with a debt, they tell me, to be carried over to the next year's account. Only one more lecture is to be read by a Signor Somebody, an Italian, paid for by private subscription, as a deed of charity to the lecturer. They are not rich enough to offer you your expenses even, though probably, a month or two ago, they would have been glad of the chance.

However, the old house has not failed yet. That offers you lodging for an indefinite time after you get into it; and in the mean while I offer you bed and board in my father's house, — always excepting hair-pillows and new-fangled bedding.

Remember me to your family.

Yours,

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, March 13, 1856.

MR. B——:—

It is high time I sent you a word. I have not heard from Harrisburg, since offering to go there, and have not been invited to lecture anywhere else the past winter. So you see I am fast growing rich. This is quite right, for such is my relation to the lecture-goers, I should be surprised and alarmed if there were any great call for me. I confess that I am considerably alarmed even when I hear that an individual wishes to meet me, for my experience teaches me that we shall thus only be made certain of a mutual strangeness, which otherwise we might never have been aware of.

I have not yet recovered strength enough for such a walk as you propose, though pretty well again for circumscribed rambles and chamber work. Even now, I am probably the greatest walker in Concord, — to its disgrace be it said. I remember our walks and talks and sailing in the past with great satisfaction, and trust that we shall have more of them ere long, — have more woodings-up, — for even in the spring we must still seek “fuel to maintain our fires.”

As you suggest, we would fain value one another for what we are absolutely, rather than

relatively. How will this do for a symbol of sympathy?



As for compliments, even the stars praise me, and I praise them. They and I sometimes belong to a mutual admiration society. Is it not so with you? I know you of old. Are you not tough and earnest to be talked at, praised or blamed? Must *you* go out of the room because you are the subject of conversation? Where will you go to, pray? Shall we look into the "Letter Writer" to see what compliments are admissible? I am not afraid of praise, for I have practised it on myself. As for my deserts, I never took an account of that stock, and in this connection care not whether I am deserving or not. When I hear praise coming, do I not elevate and arch myself to hear it like the sky, and as impersonally? Think I appropriate any of it to my weak legs? No. Praise away *till all is blue*.

I see by the newspapers that the season for making sugar is at hand. Now is the time, whether you be rock, or white-maple, or hickory. I trust that you have prepared a store of sap-tubs and sumach-spouts, and invested largely in kettles. Early the first frosty morning, tap your maples, — the sap will not run in summer,

you know. It matters not how little juice you get, if you get all you can, and boil it down. I made just one crystal of sugar once, one-twentieth of an inch cube, out of a pumpkin, and it sufficed. Though the yield be no greater than that, this is not less the season for it, and it will be not the less sweet, nay, it will be infinitely the sweeter.

Shall, then, the maple yield sugar, and not man? Shall the farmer be thus active, and surely have so much sugar to show for it, before this very March is gone, — while I read the newspaper? While he works in his sugar-camp let me work in mine, — for sweetness is in me, and to sugar it shall come, — it shall not all go to leaves and wood. Am I not a *sugar-maple* man, then?

Boil down the sweet sap which the spring causes to flow within you. Stop not at syrup, — go on to sugar, though you present the world with but a single crystal, — a crystal not made from trees in your yard, but from the new life that stirs in your pores. Cheerfully skim your kettle, and watch it set and crystallize, making a holiday of it if you will. Heaven will be propitious to you as to him.

Say to the farmer, — There is your crop; here is mine. Mine is a sugar to sweeten sugar with. If you will listen to me, I will sweeten your whole load, — your whole life.

Then will the callers ask, Where is B——? He is in his sugar-camp on the mountain-side. Let the world await him.

Then will the little boys bless you, and the great boys too, for such sugar is the origin of many condiments,—B——ians in the shops of Worcester, of new form, with their mottos wrapped up in them.

Shall men taste only the sweetness of the maple and the cane, the coming year?

A walk over the crust to Asnybumskit, standing there in its inviting simplicity, is tempting to think of,—making a fire on the snow under some rock! The very poverty of outward nature implies an inward wealth in the walker. What a Golconda is he conversant with, thawing his fingers over such a blaze! But,—but ——

Have you read the new poem, “The Angel in the House”? Perhaps you will find it good for you.

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, May 21, 1856.

Mr. B——:—

I have not for a long time been *putting such thoughts together* as I should like to read to the company you speak of. I have enough of that sort to say, or even read, but not time now to

arrange it. Something I have prepared might prove for their entertainment or refreshment perchance; but I would not like to have a hat carried round for it. I have just been reading some papers to see if they would do for your company; but though I thought pretty well of them as long as I read them to myself, when I got an auditor to try them on, I felt that they would not answer. How could I let you drum up a company to hear them? In fine, what I have is either too scattered or loosely arranged, or too light, or else is too scientific and matter of fact (I run a good deal into that of late) for so hungry a company.

I am still a learner, not a teacher, feeding somewhat omnivorously, browsing both stalk and leaves; but I shall perhaps be enabled to speak with the more precision and authority by and by,—if philosophy and sentiment are not buried under a multitude of details.

I do not refuse, but accept your invitation, only changing the time. I consider myself invited to Worcester once for all, and many thanks to the inviter.

As for the Harvard excursion, will you let me suggest another? Do you and B—— come to Concord on Saturday, if the weather promises well, and spend the Sunday here on the river or hills, or both. So we shall save some of our money (which is of next importance to our souls), and lose — I do not know what. You say you *talked*

of coming here before, now *do* it. I do not propose this because I think that I am worth your spending time with, but because I hope that we may prove flint and steel to one another. It is at most only an hour's ride farther, and you can at any rate do what you please when you get here.

Then we will see if we have any apology to offer for our existence. So come to Concord, — come to Concord, — come to Concord! or ——— your suit shall be defaulted.

As for the dispute about solitude and society, any comparison is impertinent. It is an idling down on the plain at the base of a mountain, instead of climbing steadily to its top. Of course you will be glad of all the society you can get to go up with. Will you go to glory with me? is the burden of the song. I love society so much that I swallowed it all at a gulp, — that is, all that came in my way. It is not that we love to be alone, but that we love to soar, and when we do soar, the company grows thinner and thinner till there is none at all. It is either the tribune on the plain, a sermon on the mount, or a very private ecstasy still higher up. We are not the less to aim at the summits, though the multitude does not ascend them. Use all the society that will abet you. But perhaps I do not enter into the spirit of your talk.

H. D. T.

TO MR. A.

CONCORD, September 1, 1856.

MR. A——:—

I remember, that, in the spring, you invited me to visit you. I feel inclined to spend a day or two with you and on your hills at this season, returning, perhaps, by way of Brattleboro. What if I should take the cars for Walpole next Friday morning? Are you at home? And will it be convenient and agreeable to you to see me then? I will await an answer.

I am but poor company, and it will not be worth the while to put yourself out on my account; yet from time to time I have some thoughts which would be the better for an airing. I also wish to get some hints from September on the Connecticut to help me understand that season on the Concord; to snuff the musty fragrance of the decaying year in the primitive woods. There is considerable cellar-room in my nature for such stores; a whole row of bins waiting to be filled, before I can celebrate my thanksgiving. Mould in the richest of soils, yet *I* am not mould. It will always be found that one flourishing institution exists and battens on another mouldering one. The Present itself is parasitic to this extent.

Your fellow-traveller,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

EAGLESWOOD, November 19, 1856.

MR. B—— : —

I have been here much longer than I expected, but have deferred answering you, because I could not foresee when I should return. I do not know yet within three or four days. This uncertainty makes it impossible for me to appoint a day to meet you, until it shall be too late to hear from you again. I think, therefore, that I must go straight home. I feel some objection to reading that "What shall it profit" lecture *again* in Worcester; but if you are quite sure that it will be worth the while (it is a grave consideration), I will even make an independent journey from Concord for that purpose. I have read three of my old lectures (that included) to the Eagleswood people, and, unexpectedly, with rare success, — i. e. I was aware that what I was saying was silently taken in by their ears.

You must excuse me if I write mainly a business letter now, for I am sold for the time, — am merely Thoreau the surveyor here, — and solitude is scarcely obtainable in these parts.

Alcott has been here three times, and, Sunday before last, I went with him and Greeley, by invitation of the last, to G.'s farm, thirty-six miles north of New York. The next day, A. and I heard Beecher preach; and what was more, we

visited W—— the next morning, (A. had already seen him,) and were much interested and provoked. He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen. Kings and Aristocracy go by the board at once, as they have long deserved to. A remarkably strong though coarse nature, of a sweet disposition, and much prized by his friends. Though peculiar and rough in his exterior, his skin (all over (?)) red, he is essentially a gentleman. I am still somewhat in a quandary about him, — feel that he is essentially strange to me, at any rate; but I am surprised by the sight of him. He is very broad, but, as I have said, not fine. He said that I misapprehended him. I am not quite sure that I do. He told us that he loved to ride up and down Broadway all day on an omnibus, sitting beside the driver, listening to the roar of the carts, and sometimes gesticulating and declaiming Homer at the top of his voice. He has long been an editor and writer for the newspapers, — was editor of the New Orleans Crescent once; but now has no employment but to read and write in the forenoon, and walk in the afternoon, like all the rest of the scribbling gentry.

I shall probably be in Concord next week; so you can direct to me there.

In haste,

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, December 6, 1856.

MR. B— — :—

I trust that you got a note from me at Eagleswood, about a fortnight ago. I passed through Worcester on the morning of the 25th of November, and spent several hours (from 3.30 to 6.20) in the travellers' room at the depôt, as in a dream, it now seems. As the first Harlem train unexpectedly connected with the first from Fitchburg, I did not spend the forenoon with you as I had anticipated, on account of baggage, &c. If it had been a seasonable hour, I should have seen you,— i. e. if you had not gone to a horse-race. But think of making a call at half past three in the morning! (would it not have implied a three o'clock in the morning courage in both you and me?) as it were, ignoring the fact that mankind are really not at home,— are not out, but so deeply in that they cannot be seen,— nearly half their hours at this season of the year.

I walked up and down the main street, at half past five, in the dark, and paused long in front of ——'s store, trying to distinguish its features; considering whether I might safely leave his "Putnam" in the door-handle, but concluded not to risk it. Meanwhile a watchman (?) seemed to be watching me, and I moved off. Took another turn round there, and had the very

earliest offer of the Transcript from an urchin behind, whom I actually could not see, it was so dark. So I withdrew, wondering if you and B. would know that I had been there. You little dream who is occupying Worcester when you are all asleep. Several things occurred there that night which I will venture to say were not put into the Transcript. A cat caught a mouse at the depôt, and gave it to her kitten to play with. So that world-famous tragedy goes on by night as well as by day, and nature is *emphatically* wrong. Also I saw a young Irishman kneel before his mother, as if in prayer, while she wiped a cinder out of his eye with her tongue; and I found that it was never too late (or early?) to learn something. These things transpired while you and B. were, to all practical purposes, nowhere, and good for nothing, — not even for society, — not for horse-races, — nor the taking back of a Putnam's Magazine. It is true, I might have recalled you to life, but it would have been a cruel act, considering the kind of life you would have come back to.

However, I would fain write to you now by broad daylight, and report to you some of my life, such as it is, and recall you to your life, which is not always lived by you, even by daylight.

B——! B——! are you awake? are you aware what an ever-glorious morning this is, — what long-expected, never-to-be-repeated opportunity is now offered to get life and knowledge?

For my part, I am trying to wake up, — to wring slumber out of my pores ; for, generally, I take events as unconcernedly as a fence post, — absorb wet and cold like it, and am pleasantly tickled with lichens slowly spreading over me. Could I not be content, then, to be a cedar post, which lasts twenty-five years ? Would I not rather be that than the farmer that set it ? or he that preaches to that farmer ? and go to the heaven of posts at last ? I think I should like that as well as any would like it. But I should not care if I sprouted into a living tree, put forth leaves and flowers, and bore fruit.

I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual. It is surprising how contented one can be with nothing definite, — only a sense of existence. Well, anything for variety. I am ready to try this for the next ten thousand years, and exhaust it. How sweet to think of ! my extremities well charred, and my intellectual part too, so that there is no danger of worm or rot for a long while. My breath is sweet to me. O how I laugh when I think of my vague, indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment.

What are all these years made for ? and now another winter come, so much like the last ? Can't we satisfy the beggars once for all ?

Have you got in your wood for this winter ? What else have you got in ? Of what use a great

fire on the hearth, and a confounded little fire in the heart? Are you prepared to make a decisive campaign, — to pay for your costly tuition, — to pay for the suns of past summers, — for happiness and unhappiness lavished upon you?

Does not Time go by swifter than the swiftest equine trotter or racker?

Stir up —. Remind him of his duties, which outrun the date and span of Worcester's years past and to come. Tell him to be sure that he is on the main street, however narrow it may be, and to have a lit sign, visible by night as well as by day.

Are they not patient waiters, — they who wait for us? But even they shall not be losers.

December 7.

That Walt Whitman, of whom I wrote to you, is the most interesting fact to me at present. I have just read his second edition (which he gave me), and it has done me more good than any reading for a long time. Perhaps I remember best the poem of Walt Whitman, an American, and the Sun-Down Poem. There are two or three pieces in the book which are disagreeable, to say the least; simply sensual. He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke. I think that men have not been ashamed of themselves without reason. No doubt there have always been dens where such deeds were unblushingly recited, and it is no merit to compete with their inhabitants.

But even on this side he has spoken more truth than any American or modern that I know. I have found his poem exhilarating, encouraging. As for its sensuality, — and it may turn out to be less sensual than it appears, — I do not so much wish that those parts were not written, as that men and women were so pure, that they could read them without harm, that is, without understanding them. One woman told me that no woman could read it, — as if a man could read what a woman could not. Of course Walt Whitman can communicate to us no experience, and if we are shocked, whose experience is it that we are reminded of?

On the whole, it sounds to me very brave and American, after whatever deductions. I do not believe that all the sermons, so called, that have been preached in this land put together are equal to it for preaching.

We ought to rejoice greatly in him. He occasionally suggests something a little more than human. You can't confound him with the other inhabitants of Brooklyn or New York. How they must shudder when they read him! He is awfully good.

To be sure I sometimes feel a little imposed on. By his heartiness and broad generalities he puts me into a liberal frame of mind prepared to see wonders, — as it were, sets me upon a hill or in the midst of a plain, — stirs me well up, and

then — throws in a thousand of brick. Though rude and sometimes ineffectual, it is a great primitive poem, — an alarum or trumpet-note ringing through the American camp. Wonderfully like the Orientals, too, considering that when I asked him if he had read them, he answered, “ No : tell me about them.”

I did not get far in conversation with him, — two more being present, — and among the few things which I chanced to say, I remember that one was, in answer to him as representing America, that I did not think much of America or of politics, and so on, which may have been somewhat of a damper to him.

Since I have seen him, I find that I am not disturbed by any brag or egoism in his book. He may turn out the least of a braggart of all, having a better right to be confident.

He is a great fellow.

H. T. D.

TO MR. W.

CONCORD, December 12, 1856.

MR. W—— : —

It is refreshing to hear of your earnest purpose with respect to your culture, and I can send you no better wish than that you may not be thwarted

by the cares and temptations of life. Depend on it, *now* is the accepted time, and probably you will never find yourself better disposed or freer to attend to your culture than at this moment. When *They* who inspire us with the idea are ready, shall not we be ready also?

I do not remember anything which Confucius has said directly respecting man's "origin, purpose, and destiny." He was more practical than that. He is full of wisdom applied to human relations, — to the private life, — the family, — government, &c. It is remarkable that, according to his own account, the sum and substance of his teaching is, as you know, to do as you would be done by.

He also said (I translate from the French), "Conduct yourself suitably toward the persons of your family, then you will be able to instruct and to direct a nation of men."

"To nourish one's self with a little rice, to drink water, to have only his bended arm to support his head, is a state which has also its satisfaction. To be rich and honored by iniquitous means, is for me as the floating cloud which passes."

"As soon as a child is born he must respect its faculties: the knowledge which will come to it by and by does not resemble at all its present state. If it arrive at the age of forty or fifty years, without having learned anything, it is no more worthy of any respect. This last, I think, will speak to your condition.

But at this rate, I might fill many letters.

Our acquaintance with the ancient Hindoos is not at all personal. The full names that can be relied upon are very shadowy. It is, however, tangible works that we know. The best I think of are the Bhagvat Geeta (an episode in an ancient heroic poem called the Mahabarat), the Vedas, the Vishnu Purana, the Institutes of Menu, &c.

I cannot say that Swedenborg has been directly and practically valuable to me, for I have not been a reader of him, except to a slight extent; but I have the highest regard for him, and trust that I shall read his works in some world or other. He had a wonderful knowledge of our interior and spiritual life, though his illuminations are occasionally blurred by trivialities. He comes nearer to answering, or attempting to answer, literally, your questions concerning man's origin, purpose, and destiny, than any of the worthies I have referred to. But I think that that is not *altogether* a recommendation; since such an answer to these questions cannot be discovered any more than perpetual motion, for which no reward is now offered. The noblest man it is, methinks, that knows, and by his life suggests, the most about these things. Crack away at these nuts, however, as long as you can, — the very exercise will ennoble you and you may get something better than the answer you expect.

Yours,

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, December 31, 1856.

MR B——:—

I think it will not be worth the while for me to come to Worcester to lecture at all this year. It will be better to wait till I am—perhaps unfortunately—more in that line. My writing has not taken the shape of lectures, and therefore I should be obliged to read one of three or four old lectures, the best of which I have read to some of your auditors before. I carried that one which I call “Walking, or the Wild,” to Amherst, N. H., the evening of that cold Thursday, and I am to read another at Fitchburg, February 3. I am simply their hired man. This will probably be the extent of my lecturing hereabouts.

I must depend on meeting Mr. W—— some other time.

Perhaps it always costs me more than it comes to to lecture before a promiscuous audience. It is an irreparable injury done to my modesty even,—I become so indurated.

O solitude! obscurity! meanness! I never triumph so as when I have the least success in my neighbor's eyes. The lecturer gets fifty dollars a night; but what becomes of his winter? What consolation will it be hereafter to have fifty thousand dollars for living in the world? I should like not to exchange *any* of my life for money.

These, you may think, are reasons for not lecturing, when you have no great opportunity. It is even so, perhaps. I could lecture on dry oak leaves, I could; but who could hear me? If I were to try it on any large audience, I fear it would be no gain to them, and a positive loss to me. I should have behaved rudely toward my rustling friends.

I am surveying, instead of lecturing at present. Let me have a skimming from your "pan of un-wrinkled cream."

H. D. T.

TO MR. R.

CONCORD, April 1, 1857.

DEAR R——:—

I got your note of welcome, night before last. I expect, if the weather is favorable, to take the 4.30 train from Boston to-morrow, Thursday, P. M., for I hear of no noon train, and shall be glad to find your wagon at Tarkiln Hill, for I see it will be rather late for going across lots.

I have seen all the spring signs you mention, and a few more, even here. Nay, I heard one frog peep nearly a week ago,—methinks the very first one in all this region. I wish that there were a few more signs of spring in myself; however, I take it that there *are* as many within us as we think we hear *without* us. I am decent for a

steady pace, but not yet for a race. I have a little cold at present, and you speak of rheumatism about the head and shoulders. Your frost is not quite out. I suppose that the earth itself has a little cold and rheumatism about these times; but all these things together produce a very fair general result. In a concert, you know, we must sing our parts feebly sometimes, that we may not injure the general effect. I should n't wonder if my two-year-old invalidity had been a positively charming feature to some amateurs favorably located. Why not a blasted man as well as a blasted tree, on your lawn?

If you should happen not to see me by the train named, do not go again, but wait at home for me, or a note from

Yours,

HENRY D. THOREAU

TO MR. W.

CONCORD, April 26, 1857.

MR. W——:—

I see that you are turning a broad furrow among the books, but I trust that some very private journal all the while holds its own through their midst. Books can only reveal us to ourselves, and as often as they do us this service, we lay them aside. I

should say, read Goethe's Autobiography, by all means, also Gibbon's, Haydon the Painter's, and our Franklin's of course; perhaps also Alfieri's, Benvenuto Cellini's, and De Quincey's Confessions of an Opium Eater, — since you like autobiography. I think you must read Coleridge again, and further, skipping all his theology, i. e. if you value precise definitions and a discriminating use of language. By the way, read De Quincey's Reminiscences of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

How shall we account for our pursuits, if they are original? We get the language with which to describe our various lives out of a common mint. If others have their losses which they are busy repairing, so have I *mine*, and their hound and horse may *perhaps* be the symbols of some of them. But also I have lost, or am in danger of losing, a far finer and more ethereal treasure, which commonly no loss of, which they are conscious, will symbolize. This I answer hastily and with some hesitation, according as I now understand my words. . . .

Methinks a certain polygamy with its troubles is the fate of almost all men. They are married to two wives: their genius (a celestial muse), and also to some fair daughter of the earth. Unless these two were fast friends before marriage, and so are afterward, there will be but little peace in the house.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, August 18, 1857.

MR. B——: —

Fifteenthy. It seems to me that you need some absorbing pursuit. It does not matter much what it is, so it be honest. Such employment will be favorable to your development in more characteristic and important directions. You know there must be impulse enough for steerage way, though it be not toward your port, to prevent your drifting helplessly on to rocks or shoals. Some sails are set for this purpose only. There is the large fleet of scholars and men of science, for instance, always to be seen standing off and on on every coast, and saved thus from running on to reefs, who will at last run into their proper haven, we trust.

It is a pity you were not here with —— and —— . I think that in this case, *for a rarity*, the more the merrier.

You perceived that I did not entertain the idea of our going together to Maine on such an excursion as I had planned. The more I thought of it, the more imprudent it appeared to me. I did think to have written to you before going, though not to propose your going also; but I went at last very suddenly, and could only have written a business letter, if I had tried, when there was no business to be accomplished. I have now returned, and think I have had a quite profitable journey,

chiefly from associating with an intelligent Indian. My companion, E—— H——, also found his account in it, though he suffered considerably from being obliged to carry unusual loads over wet and rough “carries,” — in one instance five miles through a swamp, where the water was frequently up to our knees, and the fallen timber higher than our heads. He went over the ground three times, not being able to carry all his load at once. This prevented his ascending Ktaadn. Our best nights were those when it rained the hardest, on account of the mosquitos. I speak of these things, which were not unexpected, merely to account for my not inviting you.

Having returned, I flatter myself that the world appears in some respects a little larger, and not, as usual, smaller and shallower, for having extended my range. I have made a short excursion into the new world which the Indian dwells in, or is. He begins where we leave off. It is worth the while to detect new faculties in man, — he is so much the more divine; and anything that fairly excites our admiration expands us. The Indian, who can find his way so wonderfully in the woods, possesses so much intelligence which the white man does not, — and it increases my own capacity, as well as faith, to observe it. I rejoice to find that intelligence flows in other channels than I knew. It redeems for me portions of what seemed brutish before.

It is a great satisfaction to find that your oldest convictions are permanent. With regard to essentials, I have never had occasion to change my mind. The aspect of the world varies from year to year, as the landscape is differently clothed, but I find that the *truth* is still *true*, and I never regret any emphasis which it may have inspired. Ktaadn is there still, but much more surely my old conviction is there, resting with more than mountain breadth and weight on the world, the source still of fertilizing streams, and affording glorious views from its summit, if I can get up to it again. As the mountains still stand on the plain, and far more unchangeable and permanent, — stand still grouped around, farther or nearer to my maturer eye, the ideas which I have entertained,—the everlasting teats from which we draw our nourishment.

H. D. T.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, August 18, 1857.

DEAR SIR: —

Your Wilson Flagg seems a serious person, and it is encouraging to hear of a contemporary who recognizes Nature so squarely, and selects such a theme as “Barns.” (I would rather “Mount Auburn” were omitted.) But he is not alert enough. He wants stirring up with a pole. He

should practise turning a series of somersets rapidly, or jump up and see how many times he can strike his feet together before coming down. Let him make the earth turn round now the other way, and whet his wits on it, whichever way it goes, as on a grindstone ; in short, see how many ideas he can entertain at once.

His style, as I remember, is singularly vague (I refer to the book), and, before I got to the end of the sentences, I was off the track. If you indulge in long periods, you must be sure to have a snapper at the end. As for style of writing, if one has anything to say, it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground. There are no two ways about it, but down it comes, and he may stick in the points and stops wherever he can get a chance. New ideas come into this world somewhat like falling meteors, with a flash and an explosion, and perhaps somebody's castle-roof perforated. To try to polish the stone in its descent, to give it a peculiar turn, and make it whistle a tune, perchance, would be of no use, if it were possible. Your polished stuff turns out not to be meteoric, but of this earth. However, there is plenty of time, and Nature is an admirable schoolmistress.

Speaking of correspondence, you ask me if I "cannot turn over a new leaf in that line." I certainly could if I were to receive it; but just then I looked up and saw that your page was dated "May 10," though mailed in August, and

it occurred to me that I had seen you since that date this year. Looking again, it appeared that your note was written in '56!! However, it was a *new* leaf to me, and I *turned it over* with as much interest as if it had been written the day before. Perhaps you kept it so long, in order that the manuscript and subject-matter might be more in keeping with the old-fashioned paper on which it was written.

I travelled the length of Cape Cod on foot, soon after you were here, and, within a few days, have returned from the wilds of Maine, where I have made a journey of three hundred and twenty-five miles with a canoe and an Indian, and a single white companion, — E—— H——, Esq., of this town, lately from California, — traversing the headwaters of the Kennebeck; Penobscot, and St. John's.

Can't you extract any advantage out of that depression of spirits you refer to? It suggests to me cider-mills, wine-presses, &c., &c. All kinds of pressure or power should be used and made to turn some kind of machinery.

C—— was just leaving Concord for Plymouth when I arrived, but said he should be here again in two or three days.

Please remember me to your family, and say that I have at length learned to sing Tom Bowlin according to the notes.

Yours truly,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, September 9, 1857.

FRIEND R——: —

I thank you for your kind invitation to visit you, but I have taken so many vacations this year, — at New Bedford, Cape Cod, and Maine, — that any more relaxation — call it rather dissipation — will cover me with shame and disgrace. I have not earned what I have already enjoyed. As some heads cannot carry much wine, so it would seem that I cannot bear so much society as you can. I have an immense appetite for solitude, like an infant for sleep, and if I don't get enough of it this year, I shall cry all the next.

My mother's house is full at present; but if it were not, I would have no right to invite you hither, while entertaining such designs as I have hinted at. However, if you care to storm the town, I will engage to take some afternoon walks with you, — retiring into profoundest solitude the most sacred part of the day.

Yours sincerely,

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, November 16, 1857.

MR. B——: —

You have got the start again. It was I that owed you a letter or two, if I mistake not.

They make a great ado now-a-days about hard times; but I think that the community generally, ministers and all, take a wrong view of the matter, though, some of the ministers preaching according to a formula, may pretend to take a right one. This general failure, both private and public, is rather occasion for rejoicing, as reminding us whom we have at the helm, — that justice is always done. If our merchants did not most of them fail, and the banks too, my faith in the old laws of the world would be staggered. The statement that ninety-six in a hundred doing such business surely break down, is perhaps the sweetest fact that statistics have revealed, — exhilarating as the fragrance of shallows in spring. Does it not say somewhere, “The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice”? If thousands are thrown out of employment, it suggests that they were not well employed. Why don't they take the hint? It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?

The merchants and company have long laughed at transcendentalism, higher laws, &c., crying, “None of your moonshine,” as if they were an-

chored to something not only definite, but sure and permanent. If there was any institution which was presumed to rest on a solid and secure basis, and more than any other represented this boasted common sense, prudence, and practical talent, it was the bank; and now those very banks are found to be mere reeds shaken by the wind. Scarcely one in the land has kept its promise. It would seem as if you only need live forty years in any age of this world, to see its most promising government become the government of Kansas, and banks nowhere. Not merely the Brook Farm and Fourierite communities, but now the community generally has failed. But there is the moonshine still, serene, beneficent, and unchanged. Hard times, I say, have this value, among others, that they show us what such promises are worth, — where the *sure* banks are. I heard some merchant praised the other day, because he had paid some of his debts, though it took nearly all he had (why, I've done as much as that myself many times, and a little more), and then gone to board. What if he has? I hope he's got a good boarding-place, and can pay for it. It's not everybody that can. However, in my opinion, it is cheaper to keep house, i. e. if you don't keep too big a one.

Men will tell you sometimes that "money's hard." That shows it was not made to eat, I say. Only think of a man in this new world, in his log cabin, in the midst of a corn and potato

patch, with a sheepfold on one side, talking about money being hard! So are flints hard; there is no alloy in them. What has that to do with his raising his food, cutting his wood (or breaking it), keeping in-doors when it rains, and, if need be, spinning and weaving his clothes? Some of those who sank with the steamer the other day found out that money was *heavy* too. Think of a man's priding himself on this kind of wealth, as if it greatly enriched him. As if one struggling in mid-ocean with a bag of gold on his back should gasp out, "I am worth a hundred thousand dollars." I see them struggling just as ineffectually on dry land, nay, even more hopelessly, for, in the former case, rather than sink, they will finally let the bag go; but in the latter they are pretty sure to hold and go down with it. I see them swimming about in their great-coats, collecting their rents, really *getting their dues*, drinking bitter draughts which only increase their thirst, becoming more and more water-logged, till finally they sink plumb down to the bottom. But enough of this.

Have you ever read Ruskin's books? If not, I would recommend you to try the second and third volumes (not parts) of his *Modern Painters*. I am now reading the fourth, and have read most of his other books lately. They are singularly good and encouraging, though not without crudeness and bigotry. The themes in the volumes referred

to are Infinity, Beauty, Imagination, Love of Nature, &c., — all treated in a very living manner. I am rather surprised by them. It is remarkable that these things should be said with reference to painting chiefly, rather than literature. The Seven Lamps of Architecture, too, is made of good stuff; but, as I remember, there is too much about art in it for me and the Hottentots. We want to know about matters and things in general. Our house is as yet a hut.

You must have been enriched by your solitary walk over the mountains. I suppose that I feel the same awe when on their summits that many do on entering a church. To see what kind of earth that is on which you have a house and garden somewhere, perchance! It is equal to the lapse of many years. You must ascend a mountain to learn your relation to matter, and so to your own body, for *it* is at home there, though *you* are not. It might have been composed there, and will have no further to go to return to dust there, than in your garden; but your spirit inevitably comes away, and brings your body with it, if it lives. Just as awful really, and as glorious, is your garden. See how I can play with my fingers! They are the funniest companions I have ever found. Where did they come from? What strange control I have over them! *Who* am I? What are they? — those little peaks — call them Madison, Jefferson, Lafayette. What is *the matter*? *My*

fingers ten, I say. Why, ere long, they may form the topmost crystal of Mount Washington. I go up there to see my body's cousins. There are some fingers, toes, bowels, &c., that I take an interest in, and therefore I am interested in all their relations.

Let me suggest a theme for you: to state to yourself precisely and completely what that walk over the mountains amounted to for you, — returning to this essay again and again, until you are satisfied that all that was important in your experience is in it. Give this good reason to yourself for having gone over the mountains, for mankind is ever going over a mountain. Don't suppose that you can tell it precisely the first dozen times you try, but at 'em again, especially when, after a sufficient pause, you suspect that you are touching the heart or summit of the matter, reiterate your blows there, and account for the mountain to yourself. Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short. It did not take very long to get over the mountain, you thought; but have you got over it indeed? If you have been to the top of Mount Washington, let me ask, what did you find there? That is the way they prove witnesses, you know. Going up there and being blown on is nothing. We never do much climbing while we are there, but we eat our luncheon, &c., very much as at home. It is after we get home that we really go over the mountain,

if ever. What did the mountain say? What did the mountain do?

I keep a mountain anchored off eastward a little way, which I ascend in my dreams both awake and asleep. Its broad base spreads over a village or two, which do not know it; neither does it know them, nor do I when I ascend it. I can see its general outline as plainly now in my mind as that of Wachuset. I do not invent in the least, but state exactly what I see. I find that I go up it when I am light-footed and earnest. It ever smokes like an altar with its sacrifice. I am not aware that a single villager frequents it or knows of it. I keep this mountain to ride instead of a horse.

Do you not mistake about seeing Moosehead Lake from Mount Washington? That must be about one hundred and twenty miles distant, or nearly twice as far as the Atlantic, which last some doubt if they can see thence. Was it not Umbagog?

Dr. Solger has been lecturing in the vestry in this town on Geography, to Sanborn's scholars, for several months past, at five P. M. E—— and A—— have been to hear him. I was surprised when the former asked me, the other day, if I was not going to hear Dr. Solger. What, to be sitting in a meeting-house cellar at that time of day, when you might possibly be out-doors! I never thought of such a thing. What was the sun made

for? If he does not prize daylight, I do. Let him lecture to owls and dormice. He must be a wonderful lecturer indeed who can keep me indoors at such an hour, when the night is coming in which no man can walk.

Are you in want of amusement now-a-days? Then play a little at the game of getting a living. There never was anything equal to it. Do it temperately, though, and don't sweat. Don't let this secret out, for I have a design against the Opera. OPERA!! Pass along the exclamations, devil.

Now is the time to become conversant with your wood-pile (this comes under Work for the Month), and be sure you put some warmth into it by your mode of getting it. Do not consent to be passively warmed. An intense degree of that is the hotness that is threatened. But a positive warmth within can withstand the fiery furnace, as the vital heat of a living man can withstand the heat that cooks meat.

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, June 30, 1858.

FRIEND R——: —

I am on the point of starting for the White Mountains in a wagon with my neighbor E—— H——, and I write to you now rather to apologize for not writing, than to answer worthily your three notes. I thank you heartily for them. You will not care for a little delay in acknowledging them, since your date shows that you can afford to wait. Indeed, my head has been so full of company, &c., that I could not reply to you fitly before, nor can I now.

As for preaching to men these days in the Walden strain, is it of any consequence to preach to an audience of men who *can* fail, or who can be *revived*? There are few beside. Is it any success to interest these parties? If a man has *speculated* and *failed*, he will probably do these things again, in spite of you or me.

I confess that it is rare that I rise to sentiment in my relations to men, — ordinarily to a mere patient, or may be wholesome good-will. I can imagine something more, but the truth compels me to regard the ideal and the actual as two things.

Channing has come, and as suddenly gone, and left a short poem, "Near Home," published (?) or printed by Monroe, which I have hardly had

time to glance at. As you may guess, I learn nothing of you from him.

You already foresee my answer to your invitation to make you a summer visit: I am bound for the mountains. But I trust that you have vanquished, ere this, those dusky demons that seem to lurk around the Head of the River. You know that this warfare is nothing but a kind of nightmare, and it is our thoughts alone which give those *unworthies* any body or existence.

I made an excursion with B——, of Worcester, to Monadnock, a few weeks since. We took our blankets and food, spent two nights on the mountain, and did not go into a house.

A—— has been very busy for a long time repairing an old shell of a house, and I have seen very little of him. I have looked more at the houses which birds build. W—— made us all very generous presents from his nursery in the spring. Especially did he remember A——.

Excuse me for not writing any more at present, and remember me to your family.

Yours,

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, November 6, 1858.

FRIEND R——:—

I was much pleased with your lively and life-like account of your voyage. You were more than repaid for your trouble after all. The coast of Nova Scotia, which you sailed along from Windsor westward, is particularly interesting to the historian of this country, having been settled earlier than Plymouth. Your "Isle of Haut" is properly "Isle Hante," or the High Island of Champlain's map. There is another off the coast of Maine. By the way, the American elk, of *American authors*, (*Cervus Canadensis*;) is a distinct animal from the moose (*Cervus alces*), though the latter is also called elk by many.

You drew a very vivid portrait of the Australian, — short and stout, with a pipe in his mouth, and his book inspired by beer, Pot First, Pot Second, &c. I suspect that he must be pot-bellied withal. Methinks I see the smoke going up from him as from a cottage on the moor. If he does not quench his genius with his beer, it may burst into a clear flame at last. However, perhaps he intentionally adopts the low style.

What do you mean by that ado about smoking, and my "purer tastes"? I should like his pipe as well as his beer, at least. Neither of them is so bad as to be "highly connected," which you say

he is, unfortunately. No! I expect nothing but pleasure in "smoke from *your* pipe."

You and the Australian must have put your heads together when you concocted those titles, — with pipes in your mouths over a pot of beer. I suppose that your chapters are, Whiff the First, Whiff the Second, &c. But of course it is a more modest expression for "Fire from my Genius."

You must have been very busy since you came back, or before you sailed, to have brought out your History, of whose publication I had not heard. I suppose that I have read it in the Mercury. Yet I am curious to see how it looks in a volume, with your name on the title-page.

I am more curious still about the poems. Pray put some sketches into the book: your shanty for frontispiece; A—— and W——'s boat (if you can) running for Cuttyhunk in a tremendous gale; not forgetting "Be honest boys," &c., near by; the Middleborough Ponds, with a certain island looming in the distance; the Quaker meeting-house, and the Brady House, if you like; the villagers catching smelts with dip-nets in the twilight, at the Head of the River, &c., &c. Let it be a local and villageous book as much as possible. Let some one make a characteristic selection of mottoes from your shanty walls, and sprinkle them in an irregular manner, at all angles, over the fly leaves and margins, as a man stamps his name in a hurry; and also canes, pipes, and

jackknives, of all your patterns, about the frontispiece. I can think of plenty of devices for tailpieces. Indeed, I should like to see a hair-pillow, accurately drawn, for one; a cat, with a bell on, for another; the old horse, with his age printed in the hollow of his back; half a cocoa-nut shell by a spring; a sheet of blotted paper; a settle occupied by a settler at full length, &c., &c., &c. Call all the arts to your aid.

Don't wait for the Indian summer, but bring it with you.

Yours truly,

H. D. T.

P. S. — Let me ask a favor. I am trying to write something about the autumnal tints, and I wish to know how much our trees differ from English and European ones in this respect. Will you observe, or learn for me, what English or European trees, if any, still retain their leaves in Mr. Arnold's garden (the gardener will supply the true names); and also if the foliage of any (and what) European or foreign trees there have been brilliant the past month. If you will do this you will greatly oblige me. I return the newspaper with this.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, January 1, 1859.

MR. B.——: —

It may interest you to hear that C—— has been this way again, *via* Montreal and Lake Huron, going to the West Indies, or rather to Weiss-nicht-wo, whither he urges me to accompany him. He is rather more demonstrative than before, and, on the whole, what would be called “a good fellow,” — is a man of principle, and quite reliable, but very peculiar. I have been to New Bedford with him, to show him a whaling town and R——. I was glad to hear that you had called on R——. How did you like him? I suspect that you did not see one another fairly.

I have lately got back to that glorious society, called Solitude, where we meet our Friends continually, and can imagine the outside world also to be peopled. Yet some of my acquaintance would fain hustle me into the almshouse for *the sake of society*, as if I were pining for that diet, when I seem to myself a most befriended man, and find constant employment. However, they do not believe a word I say. They have got a club, the handle of which is in the Parker House at Boston, and with this they beat me from time to time, expecting to make me tender or minced meat so, fit for a club to dine off.

“ Hercules with his club
 The Dragon did drub ;
 But More of More Hall,
 With nothing at all,
 He slew the Dragon of Wantley.”

Ah ! that More of More Hall knew what fair play was. C——, who wrote to me about it once, brandishing the club vigorously, being set on by another, probably, says *now*, seriously, that he is sorry to find by my letters that I am “ absorbed in politics,” and adds, begging my pardon for his plainness, “ Beware of an extraneous life !” and so he does his duty, and washes his hands of me. I tell him that it is as if he should say to the sloth, that fellow that creeps so slowly along a tree, and cries *ai* from time to time, “ Beware of dancing !”

The doctors are all agreed that I am suffering for want of society. Was never a case like it ? First, I did not know that I was suffering at all. Secondly, as an Irishman might say, I had thought it was indigestion of the society I got.

As for the Parker House, I went there once, when the Club was away, but I found it hard to see through the cigar smoke, and men were deposited about in chairs over the marble floor, as thick as legs of bacon in a smoke-house. It was all smoke, and no salt, attic or other. The only room in Boston which I visit with alacrity, is the Gentlemen’s Room at the Fitchburg Depôt, where I wait for the cars, sometimes for two hours, in order to get out of town. It is a paradise to the Parker

House, for no smoking is allowed, and there is far more retirement. A large and respectable club of us hire it (Town and Country Club), and I am pretty sure to find some one there whose face is set the same way as my own.

My last essay, on which I am still engaged, is called *Autumnal Tints*. I do not know how readable (i. e. by me to others) it will be.

I met Mr. J—— the other night at Emerson's, at an Alcottian conversation, at which, however, A—— did not talk much, being disturbed by J——'s opposition. The latter is a hearty man enough, with whom you can differ very satisfactorily, on account of both his doctrines and his good temper. He utters *quasi* philanthropic dogmas in a metaphysic dress; but they are for all practical purposes very crude. He charges society with all the crime committed, and praises the criminal for committing it. But I think that all the remedies he suggests out of his head, — for he goes no farther, hearty as he is, — would leave us about where we are now. For, of course, it is not by a gift of turkeys on Thanksgiving Day that he proposes to convert the criminal, but by a true sympathy with each one, — with him, among the rest, who lyingly tells the world from the gallows that he has never been treated kindly by a single mortal since he was born. But it is not so easy a thing to sympathize with another, though you may have the best disposition to do it. There is Dob-

son over the hill. Have not you and I and all the world been trying, ever since he was born, to sympathize with him? (as doubtless he with us,) and yet we have got no further than to send him to the House of Correction once at least; and he, on the other hand, as I hear, has sent us to another place several times. This is the real state of things, as I understand it, as least so far as J——'s remedies go. We are now, alas! exercising what charity we actually have, and new laws would not give us any more. But, perchance, we might make some improvements in the House of Correction. You and I are Dobson; what will J—— do for us?

Have you found at last in your wanderings a place where the solitude is sweet?

What mountain are you camping on now-days? Though I had a good time at the mountains, I confess that the journey did not bear any fruit that I know of. I did not expect it would. The mode of it was not simple and adventurous enough. You must first have made an infinite demand, and not unreasonably, but after a corresponding outlay, have an all-absorbing purpose, and at the same time that your feet bear you hither and thither, travel much more in imagination.

To let the mountains slide, — live at home like a traveller. It should not be in vain that these things are shown us from day to day. Is not

each withered leaf that I see in my walks something which I have travelled to find? — travelled, who can tell how far? What a fool he must be who thinks that his El Dorado is anywhere but where he lives!

We are always, methinks, in some kind of ravine, though our bodies may walk the smooth streets of Worcester. Our souls (I use this word for want of a better) are ever perched on its rocky sides, overlooking that lowland. (What a more than Tuckerman's Ravine is the body itself, in which the "soul" is encamped, when you come to look into it! However, eagles always have chosen such places for their eyries.)

Thus is it ever with your fair cities of the plain. Their streets may be paved with silver and gold, and six carriages roll abreast in them, but the real *homes* of the citizens are in the Tuckerman's Ravines which ray out from that centre into the mountains round about, one for each man, woman, and child. The masters of life have so ordered it. That is their *beau-ideal* of a country seat. There is no danger of being "*tuckered*" out before you get to it.

So we live in Worcester and in Concord, each man taking his exercise regularly in his ravine, like a lion in his cage, and sometimes spraining his ankle there. We have very few clear days, and a great many small plagues which keep us busy. Sometimes, I suppose, you hear a neighbor halloo

(B——, may be) and think it is a bear. Nevertheless, on the whole, we think it very grand and exhilarating, this ravine life. It is a capital advantage withal, living so high, the excellent drainage of that city of God. Routine is but a shallow and insignificant sort of ravine, such as the ruts are, the conduits of puddles. But these ravines are the source of mighty streams, — precipitous, icy, savage, as they are, haunted by bears and loup-cerviers, there are born not only Sacos and Amazons, but prophets who will redeem the world. The at last smooth and fertilizing water at which nations drink and navies supply themselves, begins with melted glaciers, and burst thunder-spouts. Let us pray, that, if we are not flowing through some Mississippi valley which we fertilize, — and it is not likely we are, — we may know ourselves shut in between grim and mighty mountain walls amid the clouds, falling a thousand feet in a mile, through dwarfed fir and spruce, over the rocky insteps of slides, being exercised in our minds, and so developed.

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, September 28, 1859.

MR. B——:—

I am not sure that I am in a fit mood to write to you, for I feel and think rather too much like a business man, having some very irksome affairs to attend to these months and years on account of my family. This is the way I am serving King Admetus, confound him! If it were not for my relations, I would let the wolves prey on his flocks to their bellies' content. Such fellows you have to deal with! herdsmen of some other king, or of the same, who tell no tale, but in the sense of counting their flocks, and then lie drunk under a hedge. How is your grist ground? Not by some murmuring stream, while you lie dreaming on the bank; but, it seems, you must take hold with your hands, and shove the wheel round. You can't depend on streams, poor feeble things! You can't depend on worlds, left to themselves; but you've got to oil them and goad them along. In short, you've got to carry on two farms at once, — the farm on the earth and the farm in your mind. Those Crimean and Italian battles were mere boys' play, — they are the scrapes into which truants get. But what a battle a man must fight everywhere to maintain his standing army of thoughts, and march with them in orderly array through the always hostile country! How

many enemies there are to sane thinking! Every soldier has succumbed to them before he enlists for those other battles. Men may sit in chambers, seemingly safe and sound, and yet despair, and turn out at last only hollowness and dust within, like a Dead Sea apple. A standing army of numerous, brave, and well-disciplined thoughts, and you at the head of them, marching straight to your goal! How to bring this about is the problem, and Scott's Tactics will not help you to it. Think of a poor fellow begirt only with a sword-belt, and no such staff of athletic thought! his brains rattling as he walks and *talks!* These are your pretorian guard. It is easy enough to maintain a family, or a state, but it is hard to maintain these children of your brain (or say, rather, these guests that trust to enjoy your hospitality), they make such great demands; and yet, he who does only the former, and loses the power to *think* originally, or as only he ever can, fails miserably. Keep up the fires of thought, and all will go well.

Zouaves? — pish! How you can overrun a country, climb any rampart, and carry any fortress, with an army of *alert* thoughts! — thoughts that send their bullets home to heaven's door, — with which you can *take* the whole world, without paying for it, or robbing anybody. See, the conquering hero comes! You *fail* in your thoughts, or you *prevail* in your thoughts only. Provided

you *think* well, the heavens falling, or the earth gaping, will be music for you to march by. No foe can ever see you, or you him; you cannot so much as *think* of him. Swords have no edges, bullets no penetration, for such a contest. In your mind must be a liquor which will dissolve the world whenever it is dropt in it. There is no universal solvent but this, and all things together cannot saturate it. It will hold the universe in solution, and yet be as translucent as ever. The vast machine may indeed roll over our toes, and we not know it, but it would rebound and be staved to pieces like an empty barrel, if it should strike fair and square on the smallest and least angular of a man's thoughts.

You seem not to have taken Cape Cod the right way. I think that you should have persevered in walking on the beach and on the bank, even to the land's end, however soft, and so, by long knocking at Ocean's gate, have gained admittance at last, — better, if separately, and in a storm, not knowing where you would sleep by night, or eat by day. Then you should have given a day to the sand behind Provincetown, and ascended the hills there, and been blown on considerably. I hope that you like to remember the journey better than you did to make it.

I have been confined at home all this year, but I am not aware that I have grown any rustier than was to be expected. One while I explored

the bottom of the river pretty extensively. I have engaged to read a lecture to Parker's Society on the 9th of October next.

I am off — a barberrying.

H. D. T.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, May 20, 1860.

MR. B——: —

I must endeavor to pay some of my debts to you.

To begin where we left off, then.

The presumption is that *we* are always the same; our opportunities, and Nature herself, fluctuating. Look at mankind. No great difference between two, apparently; perhaps the same height, and breadth, and weight; and yet, to the man who sits most east, this life is a weariness, routine, dust and ashes, and he drowns his imaginary *cards* (!) (a sort of friction among his vital organs) in a bowl. But to the man who sits most west, his *contemporary* (!), it is a field for all noble endeavors, an elysium, the dwelling-place of heroes and demigods. The former complains that he has a thousand affairs to attend to; but he does not realize that his affairs (though they may be a thousand) and he are one.

Men and boys are learning all kinds of trades

but how to make *men* of themselves. They learn to make houses; but they are not so well housed, they are not so contented in their houses, as the woodchucks in their holes. What is the use of a house if you have n't got a tolerable planet to put it on? — if you cannot tolerate the planet it is on? Grade the ground first. If a man believes and expects great things of himself, it makes no odds where you put him, or what you show him (of course *you* cannot put him anywhere, nor show him anything), he will be surrounded by grandeur. He is in the condition of a healthy and hungry man, who says to himself, — How sweet this crust is! If he despairs of himself, then Tophet is his dwelling-place, and he is in the condition of a sick man who is disgusted with the fruits of finest flavor.

Whether he sleeps or wakes, — whether he runs or walks, — whether he uses a microscope or a telescope, or his naked eye, — a man never discovers anything, never overtakes anything, or leaves anything behind, but himself. Whatever he says or does, he merely reports himself. If he is in love, he *loves*; if he is in heaven, he *enjoys*; if he is in hell, he *suffers*. It is his condition that determines his locality.

The principal, the only thing a man makes, is his condition or fate. Though commonly he does not know it, nor put up a sign to this effect, “My own destiny made and mended here.” [Not

yours.] He is a master-workman in the business. He works twenty-four hours a day at it, and gets it done. Whatever else he neglects or botches, no man was ever known to neglect this work. A great many pretend to make *shoes* chiefly, and would scout the idea that they make the hard times which they experience.

Each reaching and aspiration is an instinct with which all nature consists and co-operates, and therefore it is not in vain. But alas! each relaxing and desperation is an instinct too. To be active, well, happy, implies rare courage. To be ready to fight in a duel or a battle, implies desperation, or that you hold your life cheap.

If you take this life to be simply what old religious folks pretend, (I mean the effete, gone to seed in a drought, mere human galls stung by the devil once,) then all your joy and serenity is reduced to grinning and bearing it. The fact is, you have got to take the world on your shoulders like Atlas, and put along with it. You will do this for an idea's sake, and your success will be in proportion to your devotion to ideas. It may make your back ache occasionally, but you will have the satisfaction of hanging it or twirling it to suit yourself. Cowards suffer, heroes enjoy. After a long day's walk with it, pitch it into a hollow place, sit down and eat your luncheon. Unexpectedly, by some immortal thoughts, you will be compensated. The bank whereon you sit will be

a fragrant and flowery one, and your world in the hollow a sleek and light gazelle.

Where is the "unexplored land" but in our own untried enterprises? To an adventurous spirit any place — London, New York, Worcester, or his own yard — is "unexplored land," to seek which Fremont and Kane travel so far. To a sluggish and defeated spirit even the Great Basin and the Polaris are trivial places. If they can get there (and, indeed, they are there now), they will want to sleep, and give it up, just as they always do. These are the regions of the Known and of the Unknown. What is the use of going right over the old track again? There is an adder in the path which your own feet have worn. You must make tracks into the Unknown. That is what you have your board and clothes for. Why do you ever mend your clothes, unless that, wearing them, you may mend your ways.

Let us sing.

H. D. T.

TO MR. D. R.

CONCORD, November 4, 1860.

FRIEND R——:—

I thank you for the verses. They are quite too good to apply to me. However, I know what a poet's license is, and will not get in the way.

But what do you mean by that prose? Why will you waste so many regards on me, and not know what to think of my silence? Infer from it what you might from the silence of a dense pine wood. It is its natural condition, except when the winds blow, and the jays scream, and the chickaree winds up his clock. My silence is just as inhuman as that, and no more.

You know that I never promised to correspond with you, and so, when I do, I do more than I promised.

Such are my pursuits and habits, that I rarely go abroad; and it is quite a habit with me to decline invitations to do so. Not that I could not enjoy such visits, if I were not otherwise occupied. I have enjoyed very much my visits to you, and my rides in your neighborhood, and am sorry that I cannot enjoy such things oftener; but life is short, and there are other things also to be done. I admit that you are more social than I am, and far more attentive to "the common courtesies of life; but this is partly for the reason that you have fewer or less exacting private pursuits.

Not to have written a note for a year, is with me a very venial offence. I think that I do not correspond with any one so often as once in six months.

I have a faint recollection of your invitation referred to; but I suppose that I had no new nor particular reason for declining, and so made no new statement. I have felt that you would be glad to see me almost whenever I got ready to come; but I only offer myself as a rare visitor, and a still rarer correspondent.

I am very busy, after my fashion, little as there is to show for it, and feel as if I could not spend many days nor dollars in travelling; for the shortest visit must have a fair margin to it, and the days thus affect the weeks, you know. Nevertheless, we cannot forego these luxuries altogether.

You must not regard me as a regular diet, but at most only as acorns, which, too, are not to be despised, — which, at least, we love to think are edible in a bracing walk. We have got along pretty well together in several directions, though we are such strangers in others.

I hardly know what to say in answer to your letter.

Some are accustomed to write many letters, others very few. I am one of the last. At any rate, we are pretty sure, if we write at all, to send those thoughts which we cherish, to that one, who, we believe, will most religiously attend to them.

This life is not for complaint, but for satisfaction I do not feel addressed by this letter of yours. It suggests only misunderstanding. Intercourse may be good ; but of what use are complaints and apologies? Any complaint *I* have to make is too serious to be uttered, for the evil cannot be mended.

Turn over a new leaf.

My out-door harvest this fall has been one Canada lynx, a fierce-looking fellow, which, it seems, we have hereabouts ; eleven barrels of apples from trees of my own planting ; and a large crop of white-oak acorns, which I did not raise.

Please remember me to your family. I have a very pleasant recollection of your fireside, and I trust that I shall revisit it ; — also of your shanty and the surrounding regions.

Yours truly,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, November 4, 1860.

MR. B—— : —

I am glad to hear any particulars of your excursion. As for myself, I looked out for you somewhat on that Monday, when, it appears, you

passed Monadnock ; turned my glass upon several parties that were ascending the mountain half a mile on one side of us. In short, I came as near to seeing you as you to seeing me. I have no doubt that we should have had a good time if you had come, for I had, all ready, two good spruce houses, in which you could stand up, complete in all respects, half a mile apart, and you and B. could have lodged by yourselves in one, if not with us.

We made an excellent beginning of our mountain life. You may remember that the Saturday previous was a stormy day. Well, we went up in the rain, — wet through, — and found ourselves in a cloud there at mid-afternoon, in no situation to look about for the best place for a camp. So I proceeded at once, through the cloud, to that memorable stone, "chunk yard," in which we made our humble camp once, and there, after putting our packs under a rock, having a good hatchet, I proceeded to build a substantial house, which C. declared the handsomest he ever saw. (He never camped out before, and was, no doubt, prejudiced in its favor.) This was done about dark, and by that time we were nearly as wet as if we had stood in a hogshead of water. We then built a fire before the door, directly on the site of our little camp of two years ago, and it took a long time to burn through its remains to the earth beneath. Standing before this, and turning round

slowly, like meat that is roasting, we were as dry, if not drier, than ever, after a few hours, and so, at last, we "turned in."

This was a great deal better than going up there in fair weather, and having no adventure (not knowing how to appreciate either fair weather or foul) but dull, commonplace sleep in a useless house, and before a comparatively useless fire, — such as we get every night. Of course, we thanked our stars, when we saw them, which was about midnight, that they had seemingly withdrawn for a season. We had the mountain all to ourselves that afternoon and night. There was nobody going up that day to engrave his name on the summit, nor to gather blueberries. The genius of the mountains saw us starting from Concord, and it said, There come two of our folks. Let us get ready for them. Get up a serious storm, that will send a-packing these holiday guests. (They may have their say another time.) Let us receive them with true mountain hospitality, — kill the fatted cloud. Let them know the value of a spruce roof, and of a fire of dead spruce stumps. Every bush dripped tears of joy at our advent. Fire did its best, and received our thanks. What could fire have done in fair weather? Spruce roof got its share of our blessings. And then, such a view of the wet rocks, with the wet lichens on them, as we had the next morning, but did not get again!

We and the mountain had a sound season, as the saying is. How glad we were to be wet, in order that we might be dried! How glad we were of the storm which made our house seem like a new home to us! This day's experience was indeed lucky, for we did not have a thunder-shower during all our stay. Perhaps our host reserved this attention in order to tempt us to come again.

Our next house was more substantial still. One side was rock, good for durability; the floor the same; and the roof which I made would have upheld a horse. I stood on it to do the shingling.

I noticed, when I was at the White Mountains last, several nuisances which render travelling thereabouts unpleasant. The chief of these was the mountain houses. I might have supposed that the main attraction of that region, even to citizens, lay in its wildness and unlikeness to the city, and yet they make it as much like the city as they can afford to. I heard that the Crawford House was lighted with gas, and had a large saloon, with its band of music, for dancing. But give me a spruce house made in the rain.

An old Concord farmer tells me that he ascended Monadnock once, and danced on the top. How did that happen? Why, he being up there, a party of young men and women came up, bringing boards and a fiddler; and, having laid down the boards, they made a level floor, on which they

danced to the music of the fiddle. I suppose the tune was "Excelsior." This reminds me of the fellow who climbed to the top of a very high spire, stood upright on the ball, and hurrahed for—what? Why, for Harrison and Tyler. That's the kind of sound which most ambitious people emit when they culminate. They are wont to be singularly frivolous in the thin atmosphere; they can't contain themselves, though our comfort and their safety require it; it takes the pressure of many atmospheres to do this; and hence they helplessly evaporate there. It would seem, that, as they ascend, they breathe shorter and shorter, and, at each *expiration*, some of their wits leave them, till, when they reach the pinnacle, they are so light-headed as to be fit only to show how the wind sits. I suspect that E——'s criticism called "Monadnock" was inspired, not by remembering the inhabitants of New Hampshire as they are in the valleys, so much as by meeting some of them on the mountain-top.

After several nights' experience, C. came to the conclusion that he was "lying out-doors," and inquired what was the largest beast that might nibble his legs there. I fear that he did not improve all the night, as he might have done, to sleep. I had asked him to go and spend a week there. We spent five nights, being gone six days, for C. suggested that six working days made a week, and I saw that he was ready to *de-camp*. However he found his account in it as well as I.

We were seen to go up in the rain, grim and silent, like two genii of the storm, by Fassett's men or boys ; but we were never identified afterward, though we were the subject of some conversation which we overheard. Five hundred persons at least came on to the mountain while we were there, but not one found our camp. We saw one party of three ladies and two gentlemen spread their blankets and spend the night on the top, and heard them converse ; but they did not know that they had neighbors, who were comparatively old settlers. We spared them the chagrin which that knowledge would have caused them, and let them print their story in a newspaper accordingly.

Yes, to meet men on an honest and simple footing, meet with rebuffs, suffer from sore feet, as you did, — ay, and from a sore heart, as perhaps you also did, — all that is excellent. What a pity that that young prince could not enjoy a little of the legitimate experience of travelling, be dealt with simply and truly, though rudely. He might have been invited to some hospitable house in the country, had his bowl of bread and milk set before him, with a clean pinafore ; been told that there were the punt and the fishing-rod, and he could amuse himself as he chose ; might have swung a few birches, dug out a woodchuck, and had a regular good time, and finally been sent to bed with the boys, — and so never have been in-

roduced to Mr. Everett at all. I have no doubt that this would have been a far more memorable and valuable experience than he got.

The snow-clad summit of Mount Washington must have been a very interesting sight from Wachusett. How wholesome winter is, seen far or near; how good, above all mere sentimental, warm-blooded, short-lived, soft-hearted, *moral* goodness, commonly so-called. Give me the goodness which has forgotten its own deeds, — which God has seen to be good, and let be. None of your *just made perfect*, — pickled eels! All that will save them will be their picturesqueness, as with blasted trees. Whatever is, and is not ashamed to be, is good. I value no moral goodness or greatness unless it is good or great, even as that snowy peak is. Pray, how could thirty feet of bowels improve it? Nature is goodness crystallized. You looked into the land of promise. Whatever beauty we behold, the more it is distant, serene, and cold, the purer and more durable it is. It is better to warm ourselves with ice than with fire.

Tell B—— that he sent me more than the price of the book, viz., a word from himself, for which I am greatly his debtor.

H. D. T.

TO MR. P.

CONCORD, April 10, 1861.

FRIEND P.— : —

I am sorry to say that I have not a copy of "Walden," which I can spare; and know of none, unless possibly Ticknor and Fields may have one. I send, nevertheless, a copy of "The Week," the price of which is one dollar and twenty-five cents, which you can pay at your convenience.

As for your friend, my prospective reader, I hope he ignores Fort Sumter, and "Old Abe," and all that; for that is just the most fatal, and, indeed, the only fatal weapon you can direct against evil, ever: for, as long as you *know of it*, you are *particeps criminis*. What business have you, if you are "an angel of light," to be pondering over the deeds of darkness, reading the New York Herald and the like?

I do not so much regret the present condition of things in this country (provided I regret it at all), as I do that I ever heard of it. I know one or two, who have this year, for the first time, read a President's Message; but they do not see that this implies a *fall* in themselves, rather than a *rise* in the President. Blessed were the days before you read a President's Message. Blessed are the young, for they do not read the President's Message. Blessed are they who never read a newspaper, for they shall see Nature, and, through her, God.

But, alas! *I* have heard of Sumter and Pickens, and even of Buchanan (though *I* did not read his Message).

I also read the New York Tribune; but then, *I* am reading Herodotus and Strabo, and Blodget's Climatology, and "Six Years in the Desert of North America," as hard as *I* can, to counterbalance it.

By the way, Alcott is at present our most popular and successful man, and has just published a volume in size, in the shape of the Annual School Report, which *I* presume he has sent to you.

Yours, for remembering all good things,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. B.

CONCORD, May 3, 1861.

MR. B——:—

I am still as much an invalid as when you and B—— were here, if not more of one, and at this rate there is danger that the cold weather may come again, before *I* get over my bronchitis. The doctor accordingly tells me that *I* must "clear out" to the West Indies, or elsewhere,—he does not seem to care much where. But *I* decide against the West Indies, on account of their muggy

heat in the summer, and the South of Europe, on account of the expense of time and money, and have at last concluded that it will be most expedient for me to try the air of Minnesota, say somewhere about St. Paul's. I am only waiting to be well enough to start. Hope to get off within a week or ten days.

The inland air may help me at once, or it may not. At any rate, I am so much of an invalid, that I shall have to study my comfort in travelling to a remarkable degree, — stopping to rest, &c &c., if need be. I think to get a through ticket to Chicago, with liberty to stop frequently on the way, making my first stop of consequence at Niagara Falls, several days or a week, at a private boarding-house; then a night or day at Detroit; and as much at Chicago as my health may require.

At Chicago I can decide at what point (Fulton, Dunleith, or another) to strike the Mississippi, and take a boat to St. Paul's.

I trust to find a private boarding-house in one or various agreeable places in that region, and spend my time there.

I expect, and shall be prepared to be gone three months; and I would like to return by a different route, — perhaps Mackinaw and Montreal.

I have thought of finding a companion, of course, yet not seriously, because I had no right

to offer myself as a companion to anybody, having such a peculiarly private and all-absorbing but miserable business as *my* health, and not altogether *his*, to attend to, causing me to stop here and go there, &c., &c., unaccountably.

Nevertheless, I have just now decided to let you know of my intention, thinking it barely possible that you might like to make a part or the whole of this journey at the same time, and that perhaps your own health may be such as to be benefited by it.

Pray let me know if such a statement offers any temptations to you. I write in great haste for the mail, and must omit all the moral.

H. D. THOREAU.

TO MR. S.

REDWING, Minnesota, June 26, 1861.

MR. S——: —

I was very glad to find awaiting me, on my arrival here on Sunday afternoon, a letter from you. I have performed this journey in a very dead and alive manner, but nothing has come so near waking me up as the receipt of letters from Concord. I read yours, and one from my sister (and Horace M—— his four), near the top of a remarkable,

isolated bluff here, called Barn Bluff, or the Grange, or Redwing Bluff, some four hundred and fifty feet high, and half a mile long, — a bit of the main bluff or bank standing alone. The top, as you know, rises to the general level of the surrounding country, the river having eaten out so much. Yet the valley just above and below this, (we are at the head of Lake Pepin,) must be three or four miles wide.

I am not even so well informed as to the progress of the war as you suppose. I have seen but one Eastern paper (that, by the way, *was* the Tribune) for five weeks. I have not taken much pains to get them; but, necessarily, I have not seen any paper at all for more than a week at a time. The people of Minnesota have *seemed* to me more cold, — to feel less implicated in this war than the people of Massachusetts. It is apparent that Massachusetts, for one State at least, is doing much more than her share in carrying it on. However, I have dealt partly with those of Southern birth, and have seen but little way beneath the surface. I was glad to be told yesterday that there was a good deal of weeping here at Redwing the other day, when the volunteers stationed at Fort Snelling followed the regulars to the seat of the war. They do not weep when their children go *up* the river to occupy the deserted forts, though they *may* have to fight the Indians there.

I do not even know what the attitude of England is at present.

The grand feature hereabouts is, of course, the Mississippi River. Too much can hardly be said of its grandeur, and of the beauty of this portion of it (from Dunleith, and probably from Rock Island to this place). St. Paul is a dozen miles below the Falls of St. Anthony, or near the head of uninterrupted navigation on the main stream, about two thousand miles from its mouth. There is not a "rip" below that, and the river is almost as wide in the upper as the lower part of its course. Steamers go up to the Sauk Rapids, above the Falls, near a hundred miles farther, and then you are fairly in the pine-woods and lumbering country. Thus it flows from the pine to the palm.

The lumber, as you know, is sawed chiefly at the Falls of St. Anthony (what is not rafted in the log to ports far below), having given rise to the towns of St. Anthony, Minneapolis, &c., &c. In coming up the river from Dunleith, you meet with great rafts of sawed lumber and of logs, twenty rods or more in length, by five or six wide, floating down, all from the pine region above the Falls. An old Maine lumberer, who has followed the same business here, tells me that the sources of the Mississippi were comparatively free from rocks and rapids, making easy work for them; but he thought that the timber was more knotty here than in Maine.

It has chanced that about half the men whom I have spoken with in Minnesota, whether travellers or settlers, were from Massachusetts.

After spending some three weeks in and about St. Paul, St. Anthony, and Minneapolis, we made an excursion in a steamer some three hundred or more miles up the Minnesota (St. Peter's) River, to Redwood, or the Lower Sioux Agency, in order to see the plains, and the Sioux, who were to receive their annual payment there. This is eminently *the* river of Minnesota, (for she shares the Mississippi with Wisconsin,) and it is of incalculable value to her. It flows through a very fertile country, destined to be famous for its wheat; but it is a remarkably winding stream, so that Redwood is only half as far from its mouth by land as by water. There was not a straight reach a mile in length as far as we went, — generally you could not see a quarter of a mile of water, and the boat was steadily turning this way or that. At the greater bends, as the Traverse des Sioux, some of the passengers were landed, and walked across to be taken in on the other side. Two or three times you could have thrown a stone across the neck of the isthmus, while it was from one to three miles around it. It was a very novel kind of navigation to me. The boat was perhaps the largest that had been up so high, and the water was rather low (it had been about fifteen feet higher). In making a short turn, we repeatedly

and designedly ran square into the steep and soft bank, taking in a cart-load of earth, — this being more effectual than the rudder to fetch us about again; or the deeper water was so narrow and close to the shore, that we were obliged to run into and break down at least fifty trees which overhung the water, when we did not cut them off, repeatedly losing a part of our outworks, though the most exposed had been taken in. I could pluck almost any plant on the bank from the boat. We very frequently got aground, and then drew ourselves along with a windlass and a cable fastened to a tree, or we swung round in the current, and completely blocked up and blockaded the river, one end of the boat resting on each shore. And yet we would haul ourselves round again with the windlass and cable in an hour or two, though the boat was about one hundred and sixty feet long, and drew some three feet of water, or, often, water and sand. It was one consolation to know that in such a case we were all the while damming the river, and so raising it. We once ran fairly on to a concealed rock, with a shock that aroused all the passengers, and rested there, and the mate went below with a lamp, expecting to find a hole, but he did not. Snags and sawyers were so common that I forgot to mention them. The sound of the boat rumbling over one was the ordinary music. However, as long as the boiler did not burst, we knew that no serious ac-

cident was likely to happen. Yet this was a singularly navigable river, more so than the Mississippi above the Falls, and it is owing to its very crookedness. Ditch it straight, and it would not only be very swift, but soon run out. It was from ten to fifteen rods wide near the mouth, and from eight to ten or twelve at Redwood. Though the current was swift, I did not see a "rip" on it, and only three or four rocks. For three months in the year, I am told that it can be navigated by small steamers about twice as far as we went, or to its source in Big Stone Lake; and a former Indian agent told me that at high water it was thought that such a steamer might pass into the Red River.

In short, this river proved so very *long* and navigable, that I was reminded of the last letter or two in the voyage of the Baron la Hontan (written near the end of the seventeenth century, I *think*), in which he states, that, after reaching the Mississippi (by the Illinois or Wisconsin), the limit of previous exploration westward, he voyaged up it with his Indians, and at length turned up a great river coming in from the west, which he called "La Riviere Longue"; and he relates various improbable things about the country and its inhabitants, so that this letter has been regarded as pure fiction, or, more properly speaking, a lie. But I am somewhat inclined now to reconsider the matter.

The Governor of Minnesota (Ramsay), the superintendent of Indian affairs in this quarter, and the newly-appointed Indian agent were on board ; also a German band from St. Paul, a small cannon for salutes, and the money for the Indians (ay, and the gamblers, it was said, who were to bring it back in another boat). There were about one hundred passengers, chiefly from St. Paul, and more or less recently from the North-eastern States ; also half a dozen young educated Englishmen. Chancing to speak with one who sat next to me, when the voyage was nearly half over, I found that he was the son of the Rev. Samuel May, and a classmate of yours, and had been looking for us at St. Anthony.

The last of the little settlements on the river was New Ulm, about one hundred miles this side of Redwood. It consists wholly of Germans. We left them one hundred barrels of salt, which will be worth something more when the water is lowest than at present.

Redwood is a mere locality, — scarcely an Indian village, — where there is a store, and some houses have been built for them. We were now fairly on the great plains, and looking south ; and, after walking that way three miles, could see no tree in that horizon. The buffalo was said to be feeding within twenty-five or thirty miles.

A regular council was held with the Indians,

who had come in on their ponies, and speeches were made on both sides through an interpreter, quite in the described mode, — the Indians, as usual, having the advantage in point of truth and earnestness, and therefore of eloquence.

The most prominent chief was named Little Crow. They were quite dissatisfied with the white man's treatment of them, and probably have reason to be so. This council was to be continued for two or three days, — the payment to be made the second day; and another payment to other bands a little higher up, on the Yellow Medicine (a tributary of the Minnesota), a few days thereafter.

In the afternoon, the half-naked Indians performed a dance, at the request of the Governor, for our amusement and their own benefit; and then we took leave of them, and of the officials who had come to treat with them.

Excuse these pencil marks, but my inkstand is *unscrewable*, and I can only direct my letter at the bar. I could tell you more, and perhaps more interesting things, if I had time.

I am considerably better than when I left home, but still far from well.

Our faces are already set toward home. Will you please let my sister know that we shall *probably* start for Milwaukee and Mackinaw in a day or two (or as soon as we hear from home) *via Prairie du Chien*, and not La Crosse.

I am glad to hear that you have written to Cholmondoley, as it relieves me of some *responsibility*.

Yours truly,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MR. M. B. B.

CONCORD, March 21, 1862.

DEAR SIR: —

I thank you for your very kind letter, which, ever since I received it, I have intended to answer before I died, however briefly. I am encouraged to know, that, so far as you are concerned, I have not written my books in vain. I was particularly gratified, some years ago, when one of my friends and neighbors said, "I wish you would write another book, — write it for me." He is actually more familiar with what I have written than I am myself.

The verses you refer to in Conway's Dial, were written by F. B. Sanborn of this town. I never wrote for that journal.

I am pleased when you say that in "The Week" you like especially "those little snatches of poetry interspersed through the book," for these, I suppose, are the least attractive to most readers. I have not been engaged in any particular work on

Botany, or the like, though, if I were to live, I should have much to report on Natural History generally.

You ask particularly after my health. I *suppose* that I have not many months to live; but, of course, I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing.

Yours truly,

HENRY D. THOREAU,

by SOPHIA E. THOREAU.

P O E M S.

SYMPATHY.

LATELY, alas! I knew a gentle boy,
Whose features all were cast in Virtue's mould,
As one she had designed for Beauty's toy,
But after manned him for her own stronghold.

On every side he open was as day,
That you might see no lack of strength within;
For walls and ports do only serve away.
For a pretence to febleness and sin.

Say not that Cæsar was victorious,
With toil and strife who stormed the House of Fame,
In other sense this youth was glorious,
Himself a kingdom, wheresoe'er he came.

No strength went out to get him victory,
When all was income of its own accord;
For where he went none other was to see,
But all were parcel of their noble lord.

He forayed like the subtle haze of summer,
That stilly shows fresh landscapes to our eyes,
And revolutions works without a murmur,
Or rustling of a leaf beneath the skies.

So was I taken unawares by this,
I quite forgot my homage to confess ;
Yet now am forced to know, though hard it is,
I might have loved him, had I loved him less.

Each moment as we nearer drew to each,
A stern respect withheld us farther yet,
So that we seemed beyond each other's reach,
And less acquainted than when first we met.

We two were one while we did sympathize,
So could we not the simplest bargain drive ;
And what avails it, now that we are wise,
If absence doth this doubleness contrive ?

Eternity may not the chance repeat ;
But I must tread my single way alone,
In sad remembrance that we once did meet,
And know that bliss irrevocably gone.

The spheres henceforth my elegy shall sing,
For elegy has other subject none ;
Each strain of music in my ears shall ring
Knell of departure from that other one.

Make haste and celebrate my tragedy ;
With fitting strain resound, ye woods and fields ;
Sorrow is dearer in such case to me
Than all the joys other occasion yields.

Is 't then too late the damage to repair ?
Distance, forsooth, from my weak grasp has reft
The empty husk, and clutched the useless tare,
But in my hands the wheat and kernel left.

If I but love that virtue which he is,
Though it be scented in the morning air,
Still shall we be truest acquaintances,
Nor mortals know a sympathy more rare.

“ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN, AND
LOVERS.”

LET such pure hate still underprop
Our love, that we may be
Each other's conscience,
And have our sympathy
Mainly from thence.

We'll one another treat like gods,
And all the faith we have
In virtue and in truth, bestow
On either, and suspicion leave
To gods below.

Two solitary stars, —
Unmeasured systems far
Between us roll ;
But by our conscious light we are
Determined to one pole.

What need confound the spheres, —
Love can afford to wait ;
For it no hour 's too late
That witnesseth one duty's end,
Or to another doth beginning lend.

It will subserve no use,
More than the tints of flowers ;
Only the independent guest
Frequents its bowers,
Inherits its bequest.

No speech, though kind, has it ;
But kinder silence doles
Unto its mates :
By night consoles,
By day congratulates.

What saith the tongue to tongue ?
What heareth ear of ear ?
By the decrees of fate
From year to year,
Does it communicate.

Pathless the gulf of feeling yawns ;
No trivial bridge of words.

Or arch of boldest span,
Can leap the moat that girds
The sincere man.

No show of bolts and bars
Can keep the foeman out,
Or 'scape his secret mine,
Who entered with the doubt
That drew the line.

No warder at the gate
Can let the friendly in ;
But, like the sun, o'er all
He will the castle win,
And shine along the wall.

There 's nothing in the world I know
That can escape from love,
For every depth it goes below,
And every height above.

It waits, as waits the sky,
Until the clouds go by,
Yet sbines serenely on
With an eternal day,
Alike when they are gone,
And when they stay.

Implacable is Love, —
Foes may be bought or teased
From their hostile intent,
But he goes unappeased
Who is on kindness bent.

INSPIRATION.

If with light head erect I sing,
Though all the Muses lend their force,
From my poor love of anything,
The verse is weak and shallow as its source.

But if with bended neck I grope
Listening behind me for my wit,
With faith superior to hope,
More anxious to keep back than forward it ;

Making my soul accomplice there
Unto the flame my heart hath lit,
Then will the verse forever wear, —
Time cannot bend the line which God has writ.

I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before ;
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.

Now chiefly is my natal hour,
And only now my prime of life,
Of manhood's strength it is the flower,
'T is peace's end, and war's beginning strife

It comes in summer's broadest noon,
By a gray wall, or some chance place,
Unseasoning time, insulting June,
And vexing day with its presuming face.

I will not doubt the love untold
Which not my worth nor want hath bought,
Which wooed me young, and woos me old,
And to this evening hath me brought.

THE FISHER'S BOY.

My life is like a stroll upon the beach,
As near the ocean's edge as I can go ;
My tardy steps its waves sometimes o'erreach,
Sometimes I stay to let them overflow.

My sole employment is, and scrupulous care,
To place my gains beyond the reach of tides,
Each smother pebble, and each shell more rare,
Which Ocean kindly to my hand confides.

I have but few companions on the shore :
They scorn the strand who sail upon the sea ;
Yet oft I think the ocean they've sailed o'er
Is deeper known upon the strand to me.

The middle sea contains no crimson dulse,
Its deeper waves cast up no pearls to view ;
Along the shore my hand is on its pulse,
And I converse with many a shipwrecked crew

MOUNTAINS.

WITH frontier strength ye stand your ground,
With grand content ye circle round,
Tumultuous silence for all sound,
Ye distant nursery of rills,
Monadnock, and the Peterboro hills ;
Like some vast fleet
Sailing through rain and sleet,
Through winter's cold and summer's heat ;
Still holding to your high emprise,
Until ye find a shore amid the skies ;
Not skulking close to land,
With cargo contraband ;
For they who sent a venture out by ye
Have set the sun to see
Their honesty.
Ships of the line, each one,
Ye to the westward run,
Always before the gale,
Under a press of sail,

With weight of metal all untold ;
I seem to feel ye in my firm seat here, —
Immeasurable depth of hold,
And breadth of beam and length of running gear

Methinks ye take luxurious pleasure
In your novel Western leisure ;
So cool your brows, and freshly blue,
As time had nought for ye to do ;
For ye lie at your length,
An unappropriated strength,
Unhewn primæval timber
For knees so stiff, for masts so limber .
The stock of which new earths are made,
One day to be our Western trade,
Fit for the stanchions of a world
Which through the seas of space is hurled.

While we enjoy a lingering ray,
Ye still o'ertop the Western day,
Reposing yonder on God's croft,
Like solid stacks of hay.
Edged with silver and with gold,
The clouds hang o'er in damask fold,
And with fresh depth of amber light

The west is dight,
Where still a few rays slant,
That even heaven seems extravagant.
On the earth's edge, mountains and trees
Stand as they were on air graven,
Or as the vessels in a haven
Await the morning breeze.
I fancy even
Through your defiles windeth the way to heaven
And yonder still, in spite of history's page,
Linger the golden and the silver age ;
Upon the laboring gale
The news of future centuries is brought,
And of new dynasties of thought,
From your remotest vale.

But special I remember thee,
Wachusett ! who, like me,
Standest alone without society.
Thy far blue eye,
A remnant of the sky,
Seen through the clearing of the gorge,
Or from the windows on the forge,
Doth leaven all it passes by.
Nothing is true,

But stands 'tween me and you,
Thou western pioneer,
Who know'st not shame nor fear,
By venturous spirit driven
Under the eaves of heaven,
And can'st expand thee there,
And breathe enough of air ;
Upholding heaven, holding down earth,
Thy pastime from thy birth,
Not steadied by the one, nor leaning on the other,
May I approve myself thy worthy brother !

S M O K E.

LIGHT-WINGED Smoke ! Icarian bird,
Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight ;
Lark without song, and messenger of dawn,
Circling above the hamlets as thy nest ;
Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form
Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts ;
By night star-veiling, and by day
Darkening the light and blotting out the sun ;
Go thou, my incense, upward from this hearth,
And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.

SMOKE IN WINTER.

THE sluggish smoke curls up from some deep dell,
The stiffened air exploring in the dawn,
And making slow acquaintance with the day ;
Delaying now upon its heavenward course,
In wreathed loiterings dallying with itself,
With as uncertain purpose and slow deed,
As its half-wakened master by the hearth,
Whose mind, still slumbering, and sluggish thoughts
Have not yet swept into the onward current
Of the new day ; — and now it streams afar,
The while the chopper goes with step direct,
And mind intent to wield the early axe.

First in the dusky dawn he sends abroad
His early scout, his emissary, smoke,
The earliest, latest pilgrim from his roof,
To feel the frosty air, inform the day ;
And, while he crouches still beside the hearth,
Nor musters courage to unbar the door,

It has gone down the glen with the light wind,
And o'er the plain unfurled its venturous wreath,
Draped the tree-tops, loitered upon the hill,
And warmed the pinions of the early bird ;
And now, perchance, high in the crispy air,
Has caught sight of the day o'er the earth's edge,
And greets its master's eye at his low door,
As some refulgent cloud in the upper sky.

MIST.

LOW-ANCHORED cloud,
Newfoundland air,
Fountain-head and source of rivers,
Dew-cloth, dream-drapery,
And napkin spread by fays ;
Drifting meadow of the air,
Where bloom the daisied banks and violets,
And in whose fenny labyrinth
The bittern booms and heron wades ;
Spirit of lakes and seas and rivers, —
Bear only perfumes and the scent
Of healing herbs to just men's fields.

H A Z E.

Wool of the fen, ethereal gauze,
Woven of Nature's richest stuffs,
Visible heat, air-water, and dry sea,
Last conquest of the eye ;
Toil of the day displayed, sun-dust,
Aerial surf upon the shores of earth,
Ethereal estuary, frith of light,
Breakers of air, billows of heat,
Fine summer spray on inland seas ;
Bird of the sun, transparent-winged,
Owlet of noon, soft-pinioned,
From heath or stubble rising without song, —
Establish thy serenity o'er the fields.

THE END.

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